



# GANDHIJI IN INDIAN VILLAGES

*by* MAHADEV DESAI

S. GANESAN,  
PUBLISHER, TRIPPLICANE, MADRAS.

1927 .







# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. Rural Kathiawad	1
II. In Gujarat	24
III. In Bengal	47
IV. In Cutch	174
V. At Wardha	214

## APPENDIX

I. In Bihar	By M. K. Gandhi	231
II. In United Provinces	..	283
III. In Travancore	..	298
A Day with Ahmedabad Mill-hands		324
Character and Village Organisation		329
A Typical School		332
Face to Face with the Pauper		336



## PUBLISHERS' NOTE

This book by Mr. Mahadev Desai, one of Mahatma Gandhi's trusted followers and his Private Secretary, describes the incidents that happened in some of India's villages when Gandhiji toured them early in the year 1925. The villages that Gandhiji visited did not all belong to one province. Some of them were in Kathiawar, in Central India, some in Bengal, in the remote recesses of that province, some as far south as in Malabar and Travancore. In all these Gandhiji was presented with welcome addresses and was given an opportunity to study the most important wants of the villagers and their exact situation. On this tour, he came across many classes of people, the poor and the down-trodden more than the rich and the privileged, and the conversations he had with the villagers and the advice he gave them are described and reported on the pages of this book. The book reveals the problems of India in its many aspects, the identity of the essential features thereof in every province, the common bonds that bind the people together in spite of their differences in language and other respects, their intensely spiritual outlook and their striking response to a movement which appealed to their higher mind instincts. The idyllic simplicity of the villagers, their susceptibility to superstition, and their respect for tradition and custom in spite of the fact that they had the effect of keeping them down and held, and in places their keen resentment at their

existing state—all these Mr. Desai describes in a manner which is most touching.

Gandhiji addressed the villagers in many places. It is one of the most valuable features of the book that these addresses are here reproduced as they were reported at the time by Mr. Desai. Here are discussed in their proper setting, as it affects real India, the problems which face India—economic, religious, political, communal, social and what not. To those who wish to realise the secret of the vitality of Gandhiji's movement, this volume cannot but be a most helpful guide.

Mahatma Gandhi's own account of his tour in certain provinces and a few of Mahadev Desai articles in *Young India* have been included as appendix as further elucidating the problems in Indian villages.

# GANDHIJI in Indian Villages

## CHAPTER I

### RURAL KATHIAWAD

Gandhiji's third tour in Kathiawad, unlike the second, which was in response to invitations from Princes of different States, was mainly in response to the wishes of the people.

Much interest attaches to Botad being selected as the first place to be visited during this tour. There was no invitation from the people, the orthodox probably did not want Gandhiji. But it has a depressed class boy's school conducted by one sprung from the same class, and who

was the first 'untouchable' to leave all and join the Satyagraha ashram where very few knew it or its founder. He is also the father of that adopted daughter of Gandhiji, Lakshmi. The school was in a moribund condition before Dudabhai took charge of it, and is now flourishing with about 90 boys on the roll. It may be noted in fairness to the orthodox that after Gandhiji had visited the depressed class boys' school and the depressed class quarter he was specially requested to visit the town and address a meeting which was largely attended.

The next item of interest was at Madhwa, a small village under Bhavnagar. There is a spinning and weaving institute there conducted by Mr. Shivji Bhai, a Jain, who left his business in Bombay about three years ago and is now devoting himself almost solely to Khaddar propaganda. The meeting took place at about 11 p.m. and it was 11-30 when Gandhiji finished his speech. Sir Prabhashankar

Pattani\*, who was specially present on the occasion, was requested to say a few words, and he readily responded with a speech which will not be soon forgotten. It was in homely rustic Gujarati and was mainly addressed to 'his people'. 'You want me,' he said, 'to tell you the joys of spinning. Well, they are no different from the joy you feel as you toil away in your fields, melting in the hot April sun, goading the unwilling bullocks to pull the plough to break the stubborn soil. It is no joy, is it? But the real joy is felt only when the harvest is borne home off the threshing floor and you sit down before it in the midst of your happy families. I had the same difficulty with my wheel in the beginning, but I cannot tell you what joy it brings me to-day. I keep it near my bed, and not only turn it before my breakfast in fulfilment of a vow I took two months ago, but when old age and

\*Former Prime Minister of Bhavnagar and for some time member of the Council of the Secretary of State for India.

worries of the State rack the brow and prevent the sleep from coming I often leave my bed and ply the wheel to drown the cares in its sweet music. I have done so frequently for over two hours, singing away my favourite songs, not to be tired at the end, but to be soothed and comforted. 'Why should those who are well off trouble to spin?' one often hears it asked. I say it is all the more necessary for them to spin. They must needs have something as a relaxation or recreation, and I assure them that I have known none better than the spinning wheel. Gandhiji has got something new to say about the spinning-wheel wherever he goes. But I simply tell you that it will be a thousand pities if you take all the trouble to belabour your poor beasts and cultivate the soil and grow your cotton, only to sell it to the intermediary who in turn will export it abroad. You must spin whatever cotton you produce. It will add to your scanty income and will



make you self-sufficient. I cannot be speaking away at this hour of midnight just for the pleasure of speaking. I have known the joy of it, I am going to take it with me to England, and spin there just as I am doing here. You do not know how I have infected others with my passion. When I made my vow before Gandhiji I had half a mind to take the vow on my wife's behalf also, but I desisted. But lo! and behold!—within three or four days I found her toiling away at her wheel, not without a few friends to give her their active sympathy. She has now got together a class of about 40. women. My daughters-in-law also spin, if only for fear of displeasing their mother-in-law. I have done. I hope to return here after six months, and give you fair warning that you shall have to render the account I will ask for.'

Palitana gave a warm welcome, and the young Thukore Saheb in handing the people's address to Gandhiji made a

felicitous speech. The State, of which the capital is famous as a very important place of pilgrimage, derives no revenue out of liquor traffic. It has none.

On our way to Amreli small meetings were arranged at villages on the way. Two deserve especial notice. Just as we reached Gariadhar, and were turning to the place of the meeting, two or three men came rushing from a distance and stood in front of our car. 'What is it they want?' asked Gandhiji. 'They are the untouchables of the village', said a man smiling, 'they want you to go to their quarter first.' Gandhiji called them and asked them what they wanted. Without the slightest hesitation they said, 'Come to our quarter *first*. Don't we deserve it?' 'You do certainly, my friends, but you must know that I can give only five minutes to your village, and if I come to your quarter you would be taking all the minutes. Let me go to the place of the meeting and you all

come there.' 'We will admit you all, please come,' chimed in one of those in charge of the public meeting and the bargain was immediately struck.

The next similarly pleasant incident was at Lathi. Now this was a place as important as Botad, if not more, and the people knew it. Ramjibhai the untouchable weaver was the first to undertake to weave *hand-spun* yarn when all others refused to touch it, and he belongs to this village. That was some years ago. He and his wife, who is a much better weaver than her husband, have since stayed and worked at Satyagrahashram for a fairly long time, and also worked at Ramesvara, a centre of the intensive constructive programme experiment in Gujarat. The people knew that they owed Gandhiji's visit to Lathi solely to Ramjibhai and his wife, and when on reaching the place Gandhiji suggested that he should go to the untouchables' quarter first, the 'touchables' readily agreed.

The visit, apart from these circumstances, was in itself also a very significant one. These people have a school of their own, and it is well managed. Gandhiji was welcomed at the school. The school master in a businesslike little speech mentioned all the things Gandhiji would want to know and stated *inter alia* that a temple was one of their crying wants and requested Gandhiji to build one. In a brief speech in reply Gandhiji explained why Ramjibhai and his wife had attracted him to their village and asked the forty and odd weavers of the place to copy his example. 'Ramjibhai had lost nothing by giving up mill-spun yarn weaving and was a prosperous man to-day. Lathi of Kalapi\* is to-day known as the Lathi of Ramjibhai. He took up hand-spun weaving as a matter of duty, and prosperity and fame had followed him and his wife and they were no longer

\* The former Poet-chief of the state, which came to be known because of his widely read poetry.

untouchables wherever they had been. What was it that deterred others from following their example?' He next came to the request about the temple. 'I am sorry I cannot encourage you in this. If I wanted to find money for you I am sure I could do so. But you must strive and find it yourselves. It is a spiritual need, and if you want to prove that it is properly felt you must yourself find the wherewithal to satisfy that need. And if I built a temple here-without your exertion, you may be sure that it will be a useless structure, and you will very likely use it as a gambling den or a tavern. But put in money earned by the sweat of your brow, ask Ramjibhai to contribute and give the lead, and then I promise you help. Collect a substantial amount, and then request the manager of your State to contribute an equal amount. I promise to find you money equal to the total of both. I may also tell you that the temple erected out of these

funds would be in charge of a board of trustees of which one would be the manager or the Thakore Saheb when he comes of age and gets back his *Gadi* another would be my nominee, and a third to be nominated by you. The temple-priest should be a truly religious Vaishnava, and administration of the temple to be entirely controlled by the Board of Trustees.' Eight rupees represented the amount presented to Gandhiji at the meeting: He gave it up to form the nucleus of the fund and asked them to start collection as soon as possible. The suggestion was received with pleasure.

Just as Gandhiji was leaving to go, a little girl came to Gandhiji. 'Whose girl is this,' asked he and began to play with the heavy silver ornament on her neck. It was the schoolmaster's daughter. 'Is not this an ugly encumbrance? Shall I take it away?' he asked the little one. 'Certainly,' said she smiling, and proceed-

ed to take it out. The father helped to take it out and also the nose ring, and Gandhiji announced amidst hearty acclamations that that was the first contribution in ornaments to the temple fund. A younger child and a sister of the previous donor next came in to Gandhiji's clutches and off went her ornament too. Can better auspices be imagined for starting a temple fund than the initial contribution of heavy silver ornaments by little virgins—pictures of innocence and purity?

## II

The untouchable friends met Gandhiji everywhere in Kathiawad and as a matter of course. Not unoften would a crowd be met, all absolutely bare-footed, standing unmoved, in the baking dust of the treeless Kathiawad roads. 'Look yonder at the well where they are drawing water. We may not use that well and we are too poor to construct one ourselves. We are only at

liberty to use the cattle trough, attached to the well, and that too when it is filled! That was the usual complaint. And when no water can be had for drinking, much less may one expect water for bathing and washing! And because they must thus remain unclean, they must necessarily remain untouchable!.

Not that the untouchables are always found amenable to reason, for Gandhiji reasons with them no less than with the 'touchables,' as one could see at Dhasa. If the orthodox Hindu refuses to get out of the vicious circle, no less does the untouchable whom we are trying to bring back to our fold. 'I am bound to see to it,' said Gandhiji, 'that you get enough clean water to drink and to bathe and wash, but will not you give up eating carrion? It is such a filthy habit, and so long as you don't give it up, I may continue to touch you but I cannot hope to succeed with the orthodox Brahmins.' The untouchable friends at Dhasa - the



Dhasa of Mr. Gopaldas Desai\*, whom we all know, had promised to their chief, when he was deposed, that they would not touch liquor and carrion, and would confine themselves to weaving only hand-spun yarn. They have gone back to their old habits, and when they found that Gandhiji had come to arraign them, they pleaded guilty to the charge of using liquor and mill-woven cloth. But they tried to make out a defence for using carrion. 'If we are expected to dispose of dead cattle, you may not expect us to abstain from carrion.' 'But you will find even Brahmins and high-class Hindus in charge of tanneries in cities. You may find me one day carrying on a tannery, but you won't find them or me ever using carrion.' 'That may be, but with us the habit follows the profession,' they persist-

\* One of the feudal Chiefs in Bombay Presidency who was deposed from his position and deprived of his estates by the British Government because he actively sympathised with Mahatma Gandhi's Non-co-operation Movement.

ed. The friends at Mangrol were also faced with the same argument. They agreed that it was a filthy habit, but it was impossible for them to shake themselves free of a habit they had inherited for ages. 'But is carrion delicious?' 'No, not at all.' 'Well, I had thought it was. If it is not, and if I can assure you enough *bajri* bread and milk and vegetables, would you not give up carrion?' 'I am afraid, no,' said the spokesman after a long pause. 'We must take counsel, and then reply to you. It is an old habit and will persist in spite of you and us. Where is the use of giving you a promise if we are to break it on the day next you leave us?' There was honesty in the man, but his reply showed what an uphill task lay before the reformer. But there are not only old habits to be fought. There are vested interests too. For even these half-fed, half-clothed untouchables have parasites feeding on them! For at Mangrol we met one such who was a more thorough

bred knave than we find in dramas or novels. He offered to be the spokesman first. 'I am just coming from the scavengers' quarters. They said to me that you disdain to touch them. Why?' asked Gandhiji. Swift came the reply, 'because we do not want to pollute our holy bodies by their unholy touch.' 'How are you holy?' 'Oh, *we* are sons of Brahmins, and *they* are loathsome wretches,' was the answer which came swifter than the first. Undoubtedly the old fox was a 'son of Brahmins'!—for he claimed to be the untouchable weavers' priest and conscience-keeper! 'But,' asked Gandhiji, 'the higher class Hindus call you also untouchables and refuse to treat you as any better than the brutes.' 'We care a two-pence for them. We don't want them to touch us.' 'I see,' said Gandhiji, trying to probe deeper. 'What is your business?' 'I am their priest,' said the fellow with impudent mirth, 'I advise them in matters big and small. I am a fortune-teller too.'

‘And can you tell my fortune?’ asked Gandhiji. ‘Right enough,’ rejoined the priest unperturbed, and he asked an urchin to bring his calendar from his house. Off ran the urchin to fetch the calendar, for every one in the neighbourhood knew the old priest who was practising his wiles openly and unchallenged. The calendar came, and Gandhiji asked him to tell his fortune. ‘Well, sir, you tell the fortune of the whole nation, and who am I to tell yours?’ said the priest, a little softened. ‘No, no, please do,’ insisted Gandhiji. ‘No, it would be presumptuous, but I would tell the fortune of the man yonder.’ ‘Well then, just bring me the calendar and let me see how you practise your profession.’ He brought it. ‘Just read this, please,’ said Gandhiji, and the old man blurted out something from memory, his eyes still on the calendar, something which he understood no more than any one of us. ‘But I want you to read what is there,’ said Gandhiji point-

ing to two or three lines in the calender. 'Dont's ask me to do it,' said the fellow unabashed, I can't read it. It is my 'belly-filler.' That's all. And the mere possession of it helps me to make a living, as it does so many Brahmins !'

So this was their god, and in few brief sentences Gandhiji broke his feet of clay and adjured his followers to cast the unworthy leader away, leaving him to starve if he still persisted in fooling them, and battenning on their credulity. The advice seemed to have had its effect, for when the talk about the use of carrion took place later, the spokesman who succeeded the fortune-teller, assured Gandhiji that though the matter of giving up carrion was rather difficult, they would touch the scavengers, as it was no pollution to do so.

But the fight with the orthodoxy was stiffer in Mangrol. The public meeting was held at about eight o'clock. There was a little corner at one end of the

meeting where the untouchables were roped off from the rest of the meeting. The proceedings began with a song in praise of Gandhiji composed *ad hoc* by a local poetaster. Then came a dialogue by the school children—a very creditable performance—combining, as it did, striking speeches and sermons on the triple programme and ending with a spinning demonstration. But it was rather too long-drawn-out and it was not before ten that we came to the business of the day. Gandhiji had to say at last, ‘This is all very well, but you must know even my patience is limited at this hour of the night.’

They were almost asking Gandhiji to start the proceedings, when one of the organisers, feeling that the welcome was not complete without a song by the untouchables insisted on one being sung by the untouchable girls in the corner ‘Stop,’ said Gandhiji, ‘before you ask them to sing, I must have a word with you. You must have noticed that my

eyes were eagerly fixed all this while on the untouchable friends in the corner. If I allowed myself to listen to the untouchable girls from a distance, the welcome address you have given me on behalf of the Congress Committee would have no meaning and all my pride of calling myself a scavenger and friend of the poor and the untouchable would be as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And what is the meaning of your hurling verses from the Gita at me in your songs in praise of me when you believe not a word of it? If all your praise is really meant I would ask you to permit me to invite the untouchables there to come and sit in your midst. If you think you cannot do so, and that all the welcome you have given me was all conventional and not real, you will bravely speak out and you don't want them. In that case I will be only too glad to go and sit in their midst and speak to you from there. That will be my proper

place, and you should not for a moment think that you will hurt or insult me if you ask me to go and sit amongst the untouchables.'

The vote was then taken, over a thousand or more voting in favour of admitting the untouchables and about thirty voting against (not one woman amongst them!). 'Now' said Gandhiji, 'I am between Scylla and Charybdis. There is an overwhelming majority in my favour, and a very small minority against. I must in all humility ask the minority to withdraw and sit somewhere else where they may be free from our pollution. If, however, they feel any offence in my suggestion, I am quite prepared to stand by my original proposal to go and take my place among the untouchables.' At this arose one claiming to be the spokesman of the orthodoxy and who was no other than the poetaster who had sung melodiously in praise of Gandhiji.



‘I am a Brahmin, sir, and I feel deeply hurt at your suggestion, and I am sure I am voicing the feelings of all who are with me here, when I ask you to go and take your seat amongst the untouchables. We shall listen to you from a distance.’ ‘Right’, said Gandhiji, ‘I will. Now, I must say a word to the friends who have voted for me. In a delicate matter like this we can afford to hurt no one, even though we may be within our rights to do as we are doing. I ask you therefore not to insist on the right of majority and permit me to seek refuge with the untouchables.’ ‘Stop, sir’, said a friend with evident tremor in his voice, ‘It was shameful enough for us to arrange our meeting in that objectionable way. But pray do not ask us to add to the shame by suffering you to go and sit among the untouchables.’ ‘I understand’, said Gandhiji, ‘that you are deeply hurt. But I am afraid you must thank yourselves for it. I could have understood your

feelings if you had from the first insisted on having the untouchables in your midst. But you suffered them to be kept at a distance, and awoke to your sense of duty, only at my instance. Pray therefore permit me to go, without offence.' And he proceeded towards the subject of the tragedy standing in the dark, wondering at the strange developments. But another gentleman from amongst the awakened orthodoxy arose and said, addressing the recalcitrant Brahmin spokesman, 'It is hardly fair for you to insist on being here. You must understand that as soon as Mahatmaji leaves his seat and goes to the untouchable friends, we are all bound to follow him, and you will be left apart. In either case therefore you cannot be with us. Why then insist on breaking up the meeting for the sake of a few? I beseech you to withdraw.' The appeal was not lost on the Brahmin friend, and he withdrew with half a dozen friends, the rest saying

that they would go and have a purificatory bath! The untouchable girls were now brought in—not triumphantly, for Gandhiji had tabooed all cheering!—and they had their song at about eleven o'clock, and then Gandhiji addressed the meeting in tones of which the deep pathos and poignancy, I will leave the reader to imagine.

But the trial was not yet over. A friend from a distance was interrupting Gandhiji occasionally, not without ignorant anger. But thanks to the non-violence that the audience had by now cultivated, he was gracefully ignored.

.

## CHAPTER II

### IN GUJARAT

During Gandhiji's tour in Kathiawad we had the delightful experience of seeing a happy family of Dhed musicians singing away in the drawing room of a Jain gentleman's house in Venkaner. A thing like this could not have happened two years ago. But the recent Gujarat tour revealed a thing which one would not have dreamt of two years ago. It was not a Jain's house. It was the house of an orthodox Brahmin priest in a little village called Sisodra, a few miles from Navsari. Gandhiji was far from well, and would fain have cancelled Sisodra from the programme. But when he was told that this Brahmin gentleman, who along with his family spun regularly and wore Khaddar made out of homespun yarn, had called a little

meeting of the untouchables of the village in his own house, Gandhiji had no heart to cancel Sisodra.

And what did we see there? There were all the untouchables of the village—men and women—seated together in the house of Keshavram, Gandhiji's seat in front of them, and the members of the family all supremely happy. Some of the village people, too, had come in to share the joy, whilst some watched the scene from outside. Mr. Keshavram's old mother came and welcomed Gandhiji. A friend asked her, 'Mother, do you like all this?' 'Certainly,' she said. 'Would you admit all these untouchables right up to your inner rooms?' 'Without doubt.' 'Would you permit them to draw water from your well?' was the third question of the patient friend who could not believe his own eyes, and was trying to make himself doubly sure. 'Without doubt,' came the reply as promptly as before. Then came

Mr. Keshavram's wife and half a dozen other ladies (all relatives and friends) who paid their respects and went back, passing through the rows of untouchables seated there. There was another question, however, in store for the old lady. 'Supposing you are excommunicated?' 'What then?' she said, now impatient of further question, 'we shall live alone.'

Gandhiji asked no questions to the members of the family, who, he learnt afterwards, were associating with the untouchables for the last three years. Only one or two questions he put the untouchable friends. 'I am glad, Keshavram and his family do not regard you untouchables. What about the rest of the village?' 'Some do touch us, whilst some do not yet.' 'That's all right. Do you eat carrion?' 'No, we gave it up some time ago.' 'Do you drink?' 'Very few. But we hope to abolish it altogether.' It was an ennobling sight. Whilst most of the leaders were talking of depression in

the country, and whilst the ultra orthodox were holding meetings to proclaim the narrowness of *their* creed to the world, this unassuming man was trying his best to put his own house in order and had succeeded to an amazing extent.

Another interesting item during the visit to Navsari was the meeting with the Parsi friends. Gandhiji delivered himself of his whole soul before them. There was nothing new in the speech, but the presentment was absolutely new, and I dare say it stirred the Parsi friends through and through. His friendship with and debt to the Parsi community, said Gandhiji, was an old story. It was Parsi Rustomji who at grave risk to his life and property gave him refuge whilst the Europeans in South Africa lynched him and wanted his head on a charger. It was Dadabhai Naoroji at whose feet he sat when he first went to England. Sir Pherozeshah Mehta guided his footsteps

when in 1896 he returned from South Africa. Even today amongst his closest associates were the grand daughters of Dadabai Naoroji, and Mithubai Petit and Mr. Bharucha who think of naught else but the propagation of Khaddar. How then could he find any fault with that community? If at all he could get into closer touch with it he would feel himself blessed. It was Ratan Tata whom Gokhale asked him to look to when he wanted money for South Africa, and he responded magnificently. At the time of the Swaraj Fund collections it was a Parsi who headed the list of donors. Dodds had placed Parsis at the top amongst the benefactors of mankind, for charity is a quality of the soul and they excelled in it. If they had given out of the largeness of the charity so much in the past, would they not go a step further?

He wanted no money, but charity in the noblest sense of the term. He wanted the Parsi sisters' heart for the poor of the



land. He wanted them to give up their silk *sarees* and take to the exclusive use of Khaddar. Mrs. Perin Captain, Mrs. Nargs, Captain and Miss. Mithubai Petit were devoting themselves heart and soul to getting fine Khaddar embroidered by Parsi women, and to selling them to rich Parsi and Hindu sisters. Would they not purchase Khaddar from these sisters? But all were not rich. The majority were poor, and the thing that even the poorest could give was half an hour's labour on the spinning wheel every day. That was the only way in which they could identify themselves with the poor. His other request to the community was to give up the use and sale of liquor. He knew it was a difficult thing to give up liquor. It was with very great difficulty that he could persuade his friend Parsi Rustomji to take a vow not to touch liquor. And even he, brave as he was, went back on his vow, after a certain time. But the attempt must be made and

seriously and once for all. They must understand that the community could not have an exhaustless stream of Tatas and Readymoneys and once a vicious habit contaminated it, the spring was sure to dry up. It would mean the ruin of a little community like theirs. It was not difficult for them to give up dealing in liquor. Theirs was an enterprising community. They could find any amount of other business to do. It was far easier for a little community like theirs to carry out the reform than for an unwieldy community like the Hindu. His heart wept to see Parsis in charge of liquor shops wherever he went. He hoped they would lay his advice to heart, and put him at ease so far as boycott of foreign cloth and liquor were concerned.

Khaddar production is not progressing in the parts visited, though the people nobly responded so far as money for cotton was concerned. Little village collected on the spot from three to six

hundred each, and Navsari collected eight hundred. It is a sign of the times that the Suba (*i. e.* the District Magistrate) of Navsari contributed Rs. 25.

That brings me to Broach and the cotton collections made there. Altogether something over Rs. 7,000 was collected in two days, very small villages contributing handsomely. But the most noteworthy part of it is that the Thakore Sahebs of Kerwada and Amod each contributed Rs. 500. Both these gentlemen gave Gandhiji cordial invitations and welcome. The Thakore Saheb of Kerwada attended the public meeting held in his village. Their handsome gesture deserves to be copied by the Chiefs and Zamindars all over India. Their names reminded me of Mr. Ratna Sabhapati Gownder of Pudukalayam (South India) who has given a rich little plot of land out of his Zamin-dari to Mr. Rajagopalachari for his Ashram. He and his family regularly spin and clothe themselves in Khaddar woven

out of their own yarn and he and his cousin pledged themselves, when Gandhiji met them last month, to work heart and soul for Khaddar and temperance. Why should there be only a few instances in the whole of India of Zamindars so closely identifying themselves with the poor of the land?

The little villages on the Nerbudda gave enthusiastic receptions and spontaneously collected large sums for cotton. The cotton purchase out of the amounts collected in Surat and Broach districts will be utilised in making distribution to spinning members who cannot afford to purchase cotton, and in supplying spindles at half prices to those who undertake to spin and get their yarn woven. This yarn also will be woven at half the usual rates. Distribution of Rs. 7,000 worth of cotton for these purposes means considerable work for workers in the small district of Broach.

The visit to a tiny little village called

Tavara was of especial interest. There was a compact little group of men and women seated in the shade of a tree facing the river. It was no use lecturing to them, and they did not want anything more than a homely chat. 'I am glad you are giving me money but why do you disappoint me in the matter of Khaddar?' asked Gandhiji. 'How have I offended you that you dare to disappoint me thus?' The question was addressed to the women. Usually it is no easy thing to draw the women into a conversation, but these Rajput women responded cheerfully. 'No, Sir, it is our offence, not yours. But we shall spin and wear Khaddar.'

'When?'

'Well,' replied an old woman with a sigh, 'Heaven knows when. My pilgrimage is almost over and tomorrow I may not be'. 'Well, well', said Gandhiji, 'every one of us has to die. But let us do so with an easy conscience. Begin wearing Khaddar today. and you will have no

qualms of conscience when the call comes.' 'I shall', she said, a smile lighting up her face this time. Now he turned to the men. 'Do you drink?' he asked. 'No; but some of us are addicted to opium.' 'Can't you give it up?' 'Only those of us take it, who are addicted to it,' replied an old man with heavy whiskers. 'Of course I know that', said Gandhiji, laughing, 'but I want you to give it up.' 'It is an ancient habit with some of us,' explained the old man, 'and it is almost impossible to get over it. But we are trying to see to it that no young man gets into that habit.' We are trying to restrict the circle of addicts.' 'I understand your difficulty,' said Gandhiji, 'I know that it is almost impossible to give up this habit. But keep your promise not to allow your circle to grow.' With this he turned again to the women. 'But won't you promise me today that you will henceforth wear Khadi?' 'We will, but it is rather difficult to put up with coarse Khaddar', replied

one of the women. 'It interferes with the digestion. And you know we eat very coarse food, not easy to digest. Besides *we* might wear Khaddar but not our young girls. They have yet to marry and they must have the stuffs.' 'I dare say,' replied Gandhiji with a smile, 'but the only way to get fine clothes is to spin fine yarn. And you must see that all of us wear coarse Khaddar without detriment to our health. And do you know Haribhai Amin?', he asked pointing to the gentleman sitting on his left. 'Oh, yes, he is a Mahatma.' 'That he surely is. And yet he is wearing coarse Khaddar. And you know what his niece who was married only the other day did? She spins regularly. But when she was betrothed, she spun very fine yarn enough to make a pair of *Dhotis* to present her husband with. Now Haribhai is rich enough to buy any amount of silken and foreign stuffs, but he and his family wear coarse Khaddar to set people like you an example, and to

benefit the poor of the land. Don't you think you should copy his example?' 'We promise, we promise', was the reply that came from the lips of many women there and with that promise from those plain simple folk Gandhiji proceeded to the next village.

I cannot close this without referring to the address presented to Gandhiji by the Jambusar Municipality and his reply to it. The address studiously omitted all reference to Gandhiji's efforts for the removal of untouchability, but was otherwise full of warm praise.

'I see,' said Gandhiji, 'that you have committed the error of omitting the untouchables. A Municipality that ignores the untouchables hardly deserves the name. The fact is that you wanted to flatter yourself that you were honouring me, and you thought you could do so by referring only to a part of my activities. You can surely refer to a part of the activities, provided they are divi-



sible. But I have so often said that my effort for the removal of untouchability is an integral part of my life, and you cannot isolate it from my other activities. I would not be a true Hindu, unless I live and move and have my being in trying to rid Hinduism of this curse. Those therefore who do believe in untouchability as part of Hinduism, or who are indifferent in the matter cannot give me an address of welcome. I am no official, nor a Sirdar, that you should give me a conventional address. Not that any conventional address of welcome can be called one. But I deserve it the least. I am a *bhangi*, a scavenger, a spinner, a weaver and a labourer, and I want, if at all, to be honoured as such. Swaraj cannot be had without Hindu-Muslim unity and though we may not have it today, we are bound to have it some day—but the absence of Hindu-Muslim unity does not mean the destruction of Hinduism. At the worst we may have to fight a few

pitched battles before we unite. The absence of Khaddar and Charkha similarly does not mean the destruction of Hinduism. But untouchability spells its ruin. We shall be the laughing stock of humanity if we hug this curse, and the religion that nurses it shall stand condemned by the world. You should not therefore have presented to me this address. It will, however, serve as a beacon-light to me. I hope that no association will trouble to present me with addresses if it cannot endorse my work for and among the untouchables.'

## II

There is one thing particularly noticeable about the discussions that take place in response to Gandhiji's invitation wherever he goes. No other topics are discussed except the live ones of untouchability and the Khaddar programme, and a topic or two of immediate local interest. In Broach informal meetings were ar-

ranged especially for a *tete a tete* on these matters, which was made particularly lively, not as in other places because of the vehemence with which the objector advanced his objections, but because of the rather unusual nature of these objections and suggestions. There was another reason too. The objector in respect of the untouchability programme is almost always an old-fashioned or orthodox Hindu. In Broach he was a youth clean shaved and in European costume, looking recently returned from Europe. The uncertainty and inconsequent quality about all that he said made the whole thing very amusing.

‘Is there not a substitute for untouchability, Sir?’ was the first question that he could frame.

‘I don’t quite understand you. Will you make your meaning clearer? Do you want me to find out better or other methods of tackling the question?’

‘Exactly, that is what I mean.’

‘Have you any particular method in mind?’

‘Yes, to abolish the present conservancy system.’

‘You mean to say the sweeper or the *bhangi* should no more be asked to do the business he has to do today?’

‘Yes, I mean that.’

‘And everyone to help himself, is that it? I am entirely agreeable. Let us relieve the poor *bhangi* of his burden and take it upon ourselves.’

‘No, no, I mean no drastic thing of such a kind. I only say, let us substitute the present by a better method, e.g., the flush system of cleaning the closets. In Europe there is this system, and hence no untouchability.’ Part of the audience had already started laughing.

‘But,’ said Gandhiji, ‘there was no untouchability in Europe even before this system came into being.’

‘That may be. But to me that appears to be the shortest cut flush system

everywhere, cities and towns and villages.'

'But there are no closets in villages and no *bhangi* charged with these duties. And yet there is untouchability. The village weaver who has to do with the closet as much or as little as you or I, is as much an untouchable as the sweeper. And you know, I hope, that though there are no closets to be cleaned in villages, untouchability persists in all its vigour only in villages.'

The gentleman had no answer left and so he too joined in the surrounding laughter. But he had thus far argued as though he was a champion of the untouchable. Not in the least, for what was at the back of his mind came out only now.

'But don't you think the untouchable will ask for abolition of restrictions about dining and marriage as soon as untouchability is removed?'

'I don't.'

'I do think so. You know I went to

England, formed new habits, and began to live luxuriously. I have returned home, but cannot return to the old ways when wants were few, and the desire for luxuries was absent. I crave for more and more luxuries today.'

'In the same manner . . .'

'In the same manner the moment you take the untouchables into the fold of the touchables they will ask for more.'

'Let them,' said Gandhiji and the house went into peals of laughter.

'But there will be chaos.'

'There will be none. They will ask for more, but you will not give it, just as the Government having given us Reforms won't give us more, because they don't want to give us more.'

'I assure you they will ask for inter-marriage and inter-dining.'

'Well, then,' said Gandhiji unable any longer to restrain his laughter, 'You have had your innings. Let them have theirs.'

'Have you any more questions? If you

have not, clear your doubts about Khaddar,' said a friend to the gentleman, who had been introduced to Gandhiji by him.

'I have no doubts at all in the matter of Khaddar. Gandhiji's position is unassailable.'

'That is why you *don't* wear Khaddar,' came a loud whisper from the audience. So the friend had his innings and another entered the field.

'This Khaddar has brought ruin on our community.'

'How?'

'Our women go in for all sorts of gold-work and embroidery work on Khaddar, with the result that there are *sarees* worth as much as Rs. 60 and Rs. 75.'

'So it is not the fault of Khaddar, but of your women, or rather yours. Don't purchase them those *sarees*, and there is an end to the matter.'

'No, that is impossible. You have set the fashion and they must have them. Their wardrobe would be incomplete with-

out these rich *sarees* that go by the name of the Khaddar *sarees*, but are costlier than silk ones.' The whole house was in merry humour, and Gandhiji heartily joined in the mirth.

And he asked, 'But is what you say correct? Is Mrs. —so expensive as you would make out all your women to be.'

'Oh, she is my niece. She is an exception.'

'And Mrs.—?'

'She too is an exception.'

'I don't know many more of your ladies, but I must have a talk with them direct to ascertain if your charge is true. But supposing they do go in for costly stuffs, what does it matter? The money goes into the pockets of our poor women. The spinner gets more if the texture is very fine, and all the embroidery and other work is done by poor women in the cities like Bombay. At any rate that is so much less foreign or mill cloth purchased.'



This cut him to the quick.

‘Why should you thus injure the shareholder?’

‘I don’t injure the share-holder nor do I help him, because he does not need my help. And my Khaddar programme, I assure you, has nothing to do with the present mill crisis. We have not at all touched the mills. My voice or the voice of the Congress reaches at best only a few lakhs of people and the rest are free to purchase our mill cloth, and they do. In fact some of my millowner friends have assured me that Khaddar has helped rather than harmed the mill industry. But I want you to understand the implication of the movement. It is not even the share-holder that gets the profit of the business. It is the rich man’s coffers that you swell by patronising mill cloth. The share-holder gets but an infinitesimal fraction, and even the man who labours for his wages gets not more than a pie on every four annas that you give on mill

cloth. On the other hand, if you tak Khaddar, it means all you have spen going into the pocket of the poor weave and the poor spinner. The middleman goes and the problem of our deepening poverty is thus automatically solved.'

## CHAPTER III

### IN BENGAL

I shall not say much about Deshbandhu Das' speech as President of the Provincial Conference.\* I know that he had to renunciate the Congress policy of winning swaraj by non-violence alone, and to reiterate his own creed, as much for the benefit of his followers as of the friends, mostly European, who had been pressing him for a declaration of the terms on which he would co-operate with Government. I may add that in those two days at Faridpur one could visualise how 'sharp is the razor's edge' was the way of a leader of the people.

\* Gandhiji visited Bengal villages in the months of May and June, 1925. He also attended the Bengal Provincial Conference held that year at Faridpur at which Mr. C. R. Das made his now famous speech defining internationalism through Indian and Asiatic Nationalism, to be the goal of the Indian National Congress.

•

However, I shall not say much about the Exhibition, either, which I am sure Gandhiji is to write about. I shall therefore record other things of importance and interest. One such is his talk with 'untouchable' friends and the other is his talk to students.

There was an Anti-untouchability Conference, of course, but the 'untouchables' there could be counted on one's fingers' ends. Two or three gentlemen, however, from that class saw Gandhiji by special appointment. One of them was a vakil and an ex-member of the Council. He had come for a real heart to heart chat and to get practical suggestions from Gandhiji. His attitude during the conversation which lasted over an hour was reasonable and sound, and he displayed such quick appreciation of facts, that Gandhiji publicly referred to that conversation as one of the rarest privileges' of his life.

Gandhiji first sought information about \

‘untouchability’ in Bengal, and he was told about the different sections—Shahas, Kaivartas, Namashudras and Mehtars—and the canker of superiority that had entered even amongst these sub-sections. Then he asked about the disabilities they had to undergo. The gentleman admitted that there was no untouchability of the kind we find in West or South India, but the feeling of superiority was there. A Namashudra could enter the house of a ‘superior Hindu’, but could not enter the room where water was kept; no Hindu would accept water at his hands; he would not be allowed to enter a temple; he could not get the services of a barber or a washerman. ‘How are we to remedy these disabilities, Sir?’ he asked.

‘That’s a nice question that you have asked. Now there are ways and ways. There are some who would use violence against the offending party and wrest reform from them. I met such friends in Poona. They wanted to present an address

to me. It was not in Marathi or Hindi but in English, as the function was arranged by an English-knowing lad who claimed to be their leader. In the address they said that if the higher classes did not mend their behaviour towards them, they would use physical force and teach them a lesson. That is one way. I told them that that was the surest way to lose all sympathy of sober men and to defeat the ends they wanted to achieve, as also to frustrate the efforts of the reformers to help them. There is another class of people—I met them in the South—who threaten to leave Hinduism and take to Christianity or Islam. I said to them that if they had any religion in them, it was only now that it was on trial and if they renounced it because they were ill-treated, their religion was not worth a moment's purchase. I was excommunicated, and I think wrongly, when I went to England, but for that reason should I have renounced my religion? The third way and

the only pure way, to my mind, is that of self-purification, *i. e.*, being free from all the charges that are levelled against you.'

'I understand it all. Violence and the kind of threats you have described are no good,' echoed the vakil friend.

'Yes. Self-purification is the way. I wonder if you eat carrion?'

'No,—very few amongst us use meat at all. The Vaishnavas amongst us do not eat meat at all. We do eat fish though.'

'Well, then; you have to do less than others by way of self-purification. What little there may be of the idea of superiority among yourselves you must get rid of. Try to rid yourselves of all that the orthodox Hindus have perhaps with some reason to say against you and you will overcome their prejudices. Not that they have no vices. But it is not yours to point the finger of scorn at them. It may be a long process, but it is a sure one. I know you can bring them to their knees by

drastic measures at times. In cities like Calcutta, for instance, if the sweepers go on strike saying they would not resume work unless their disabilities are remedied, I am sure they would succeed, but the minds of the opposite party will not be changed. Their hatred will increase all the more. The only way is to be above reproach yourselves and leave the rest to reformers. As you know, I am fighting the evil with all the energy at my command. It is an entirely religious question for me.'

'You want us to trust the reformers. We trust you, but how may we trust the others? They talk of untouchability today because we are useful pawns in their political game, but the moment their political ends are achieved they will leave us in the lurch. We do not think in their heart of hearts they believe that it is a question of purifying themselves, nor that Swaraj is useless without the removal of untouchability. Dr. Ray is there who,



I admit, is fighting hard for us. His feeling for us is intense. But I am not sure of others. There is Deshabandhu Das, of course, but he too is hardly doing all that he could.'

'But I assure you he has nothing against you, and he wants the reform as much as I do. Do you know why he cannot interest himself in it as much as I?'

'I know, Sir. He has many things to do and he has hardly any time.'

'Yes, that is it. And there is another thing. He feels that no work can be done unless by swift political action we obtain our freedom. That is the only difference between him and me. But he is absolutely in earnest about the question, and he wants the removal of the curse as soon as you and I.'

'I agree. But, then, would you want us simply to rely on the reformers? You know it has so happened that whenever we have shown fight they have come down, and whenever we have sat supine

they have looked on with unconcern. Mr.—says we should refuse to have anything to do with them. Let us also refuse all social intercourse, let us refuse water from them as they refuse water from us.'

'He is hysterical, you know. Don't do anything of the kind. You will antagonise the caste Hindus all the more. You may not feel any love for them. But I do think you can rid yourselves of all hatred against them. Maintain a dignified attitude—dignified attitude and not vindictiveness.'

'How can we join the national programme in these circumstances?'

'Why not? What is the national programme to-day? Removal of untouchability by the Hindus, Khaddar and Hindu-Muslim Unity. I think all the three aims are calculated to help to a solution of your difficulties. Even Hindu-Muslim unity means more or less a solution of the untouchability question too, and Khaddar can unite us as nothing else. Yes,

if people come to you with schemes of Swaraj in which there is no provision for you, and to which they want your assent just for the political exigencies of the hour, or if missionaries come to you with all sorts of schemes in which special rights are asked for you, you will be on your guard. You will brush both aside.'

'I have come across such missionaries and you are quite right. Our disabilities are various and we are handicapped almost everywhere.'

"They will end. There are many workers in the field. Many high-class Hindus are devoting all their time and energy to the question. And you have to trust to the good sense inherent in human nature too. When you have purified yourselves your opponents are bound to awaken to a sense of their duty. I have passed through the same disabilities as you in South Africa and I want you to do as I did. You know what I did? The European barbers refused to serve me. I got

a pair of clippers one fine morning and began to crop my hair standing before a looking glass. A European friend peeped in just then and found me in the midst of the operation. 'What are you doing?' he said. 'If European barbers won't serve me', I said, 'I will serve myself.' Then he offered his services, with the result that my hair was cropped in a most amusing fashion- patches of hair here, patches there and bare spaces in between! With regard to sending my children to school there was the same difficulty. They said, an exception could be made in favour of my children who would be allowed to go to an English school. I said, 'No; unless all Indian children with clean habits were free to go to English schools, I won't send mine.' And I kept my children without school education, even incurring the charge that I was neglecting their education. Oh! There were any number of disabilities. I can feel as one of you because I

have passed through exactly the same difficulties. I boarded a bus once and took my seat. For refusing to leave the seat that was given to me I was kicked and brutally mauled about. The other passengers were so alarmed at this man's behaviour that they remonstrated with him, and out of sheer shame he left me. But you know that I lived down these prejudices in course of time, not by retaliation but by suffering. I verily believe that the treatment of our countrymen overseas is a just nemesis for the ill-treatment you receive in India. That is what I mean when I repeat everywhere that we have made ourselves *pariahs* in the Empire and that Hinduism will be blotted out of the face of the earth, if we don't take care betimes and get rid of the curse."

'I know, sir, you have said that often, and one does feel like that. But untouchability has persisted so long. How will it be destroyed now?'

‘Why? Was there not cannibalism in some parts, and the custom of *Suttee*, in India? Do you think Hinduism could have endured if those things had also persisted. They had to disappear. Thinking minds revolted against these horrors and now that the consciousness of the horror of untouchability has been aroused everywhere, it is bound to go. The consciousness is growing upon every one of us that Hinduism is on its trial and if it is not to be found wanting it must rid itself of the curse.’

‘Then, you think we must join the Congress?’

‘You should and help as much as you can in the national programme. Do the national work, take to the *Charkha*, wear Khaddar, and purify yourselves. Above all realise the inherent effectiveness and value of character. It is your character that will tell in the end.’

‘We are very thankful indeed and shall try to carry out the suggestions.’

Please pardon us for having troubled you at this late hour,' said he, as they were taking their leave. 'No,' said Gandhiji very cordially, 'It has been a perfect pleasure to me—this talk with you. Had it not been so, I should not have talked at such length with you.'

The talk to the students may be briefly told, but for the circumstances that led up to it. He had already addressed a meeting of youngmen; had asked them to eschew all desire for distinction if they wanted to serve; had given them the assurance, in the course of the speech, that there was no pleasure in the world equal to service well and truly done; and that one could not qualify for that service without having well and truly laid the foundation of purity inward and outward; and finally asked them, in order that their task of laying this foundation may be facilitated, to fill themselves with faith in God, and invoke Him every morning and never close their eyes before

talking His name finally for a really clean, pure, good night. What more did students want from him? But they came. 'Did you not hear me last night?' he asked them. 'We did.' 'Then why do you want me again?' 'It was as youngmen, Mahatmaji, that we listened to you. Now we want to listen to you as students,' replied a student betraying a little training in the art of fencing. 'Then I have nothing new to tell you,' said Gandhiji. 'But, sir, we want to present an address also to you.' 'O Ho! So I must come to receive the address! Well, then I propose something better. Could you not come here and present me the address, and have in return a speech and something more, *viz.*, a demonstration in spinning? You see me spinning and I promise to give you a demonstration like this if you all come here.' Professor Kirpalani (who has been with us in this tour) was deputed to bear this message to the students. He communicated it to them in his own in-



imitable way, and asked them to walk out of that stuffy corrugated-iron-sheet-roofed theatre to the open free ground before Gandhiji's place where he was calling them. Mr. Suhrawardy, the President of the Conference, readily endorsed the message and asked the students to do as Gandhiji had wished. And immediately marched forth from that theatre all the students in rows of three, and in perfect order, to Gandhiji's place. A quarter of an hour ago he was spinning and had sent the message in response to which these students had marched in the hot sun. Now he was sleeping ! But he jumped out of his bed as soon as he heard that the students had come. He was overjoyed. His *Charkha* was at once placed in the centre of the verandah and he began spinning whilst the address was read out to him. The address read, he gave the following reply, his hands all the while engaged at the wheel :

‘I thank you sincerely for the address

you have given me, and more for the trouble you have taken to come here. I sent the message half joking and had hardly expected that you would respond to it. I am delighted that you have come. I wanted to give you a demonstration in spinning—an object lesson, and ask you to spin through the spinning-wheel the destiny of India. Today you see only a thread coming out as I turn the wheel and draw the sliver. But it is my certain conviction that with every thread that I draw, I am spinning the destiny of India. The conviction is growing upon me that without the spinning-wheel there is no salvation for this country of ours and I ask you, as I am turning the wheel, to set apart half an hour each day from your talking, writing or playing and devote it to spinning.’

## II

Malikanda was the first village in our tour in East Bēngal. As you go north-

east from Calcutta to Goalando, and sail to the south down the Padma, Malikanda, the home of Dr. Prafulla Ghosh and the centre of his activities, comes first. The meeting and exhibition were arranged on the bank of the Padma so that Gandhiji could go straight there and return to the launch after finishing his programme. The meeting was beautifully arranged, the platform being of mud on which opened out a huge bamboo-umbrella, a speaking witness to Bengal's art. The exhibits were all of Khadi woven out of yarn spun in Vikrampur, which is the name of the sub-division, and some of them could easily compete in texture and finish with the best *Khadi* in any part of India. There was a *dhoti* of yarn of not less than 60 counts, spun by Mr. Makhanlal Sen.

But there were more surprises in store for us. Gandhiji would not be satisfied until he had seen the village itself, and Prafulla Babu readily agreed to show him

over the village. I had heard a lot about the Bengal villages, but the actual visit was a revelation. One hears so much, everywhere in India, of the poor agriculturists' life being one long tale of agony from year to year. It is nowhere so true as in Bengal. The villager's life is an eternal struggle with nature from year to year. There are huge torrents of water rolling through the whole district of Dacca, but they serve more to flood the land than to fertilise it. Almost every year huts are carried off by the floods and you cannot be even sure of the site on which to construct them again, for the rivers often change their courses. The land they live on is one vast swamp, on which these huts of bamboo frame-work and grass thatching and damp and mouldy mud-plinth are erected to keep them from sun and rain. In one such, a Mussalman weaver was toiling over his loom. 'I have four mouths to feed and two men to work,' said he with gratefu

joy, 'and the hand-loom brings me Rs. 40 a month. I am content with it and I shall not touch foreign yarn.' As we were returning, Gandhiji inquired about Prafulla Babu's house. He was anxious to spare Gandhiji the trouble to go through bush and briar and mud and water. 'But I will easily walk across' said Gandhiji. 'I cannot leave the place without seeing your house.' Soon we came to the house where Prafulla Babu was born—a heap of ruins: 'This was the house' said he, pointing to one which was still standing, 'in which I grew up as a boy, stayed with my parents and sisters and brothers and read for my examinations,' 'All of you lived and slept in this narrow hut?' inquired Gandhiji in amazement. 'Yes' said Prafulla Babu in simple joy. And as we wended our way back to the launch, Gandhiji asked him as to what he was doing for the education of a talkative little sister of his who was accompanying us. 'A friend of mine

pays Rs. 15 a month for her board and lodging and she goes to Sister Nivedita's school in Calcutta,' said the brother who was Professor of Chemistry and was earning Rs. 500 a month as an Assay Expert in the Government mint, before he gave it up for Non-co-operation. 'I am not at all sorry,' said Gandhiji, 'We are out to reconstruct society, and some of us will have to be beggars in the process.'

At noon we sailed further south seeing everywhere on the way streams of men and women, running parallel to the Padma, to the place from where they could have a glimpse of Gandhiji. We passed Lohogunj, a busy little place roaring with jute trade, where Dr. Ghosh presented Gandhiji with a purse of over Rs. 7,000 and an address. Our halt next morning was at Dighirpur wherefrom we went in a little boat to a national school which is in charge of Mr. Jatindranath Kushari. There were thirty boys spinning at their

wheels in the courtyard of the school. Gandhiji surveyed them all and said addressing the teacher: 'I am shocked at these wheels. No wonder if we fail in our attempt to popularise the *charkha* here. I am glad I have come here. Otherwise, I should have blamed the villages in case of failure. Now, I see that the fault is all ours. Look at the rickety wheels and the thick spindles. They have to turn and turn the wheel before they can coax a thread to come out. And look at the horrid sound they make. How can the boys sing whilst spinning, if the wheel does not sing in harmony with their music? The only consolation is that the boys know the art. They have taken to it like fish to water, they have got the cunning of the fingers and I can see that in spite of the wretched condition of the wheels they are drawing out beautiful yarn. If the wheels were better and spindles thinner, they could easily spin double the present quantity.





Your maximum speed, you say, is 300 yards an hour. I promise it will be 600 yards as soon as you have reformed the wheels. The dexterity with which your boys handle them should give you an idea of the immense possibilities of spinning, and you yourself must do a year's penance to master the art and the technique of the wheel if you do not know it today.'

The public meeting was attended by thousands who listened with rapt attention. There was no noise, not even the cry of '*Mahatma Gandhiki Jai*'. So perfect were the Reception Committee's arrangements and instructions and so readily the people had obeyed them. But our next stop bore a more eloquent testimony to the consummate skill with which Satish Babu and Prafulla Babu had arranged these demonstrations. As we reached Malkhanagar, a sight baffling description was awaiting us. There were thousands and thousands standing on the bank and, as our little boat was slowly propelled.

wonderment, but Gandhiji knew not how to speak to them. 'Shall I simply talk to them by signs?' he asked Satish Babu, waving his hand, as though he was turning the wheel. 'But the best way is to go in front of every enclosure,' he said, after a moment, 'and I shall give them my message in one sentence.' This was done to the great joy of all assembled, and the gathering broke up in about half an hour.

I must not forget to mention, before I proceed further, that on our way to Malkhanagar and Taltolla (the village where this monster gathering was held), some one from the boat pointed to a masonry structure peeping out of the thick trees on the shore, saying 'That is Deshbandhu's house'. And Malkhanagar, we were told, is Babu Satyanand Bose's village. So we were still in Vikrampur division of Dacca district, which has given to Bengal its Dases and Roys and Boses who, sprung from these humble villages, have immortalised Bengal.

But I must pass on. There was a little workers' meeting arranged at Taltolla. It was thought more convenient to hold it on the boat, and accordingly all the workers went with us as far as Narayengunj, up north. There are sixty workers in the division, some of them finally weaned from their revolutionary creed, most of them graduates and undergraduates, many satisfying themselves with two slender meals a day, and some drawing Rs. 10 in addition, for their family! There are five Khadi centres and eight national schools under their charge. Rs. 13,000 worth of Khadi was produced by them during the year under report and Rs. 8,000 worth was locally sold. 'They will all work away as they have been doing,' said Prafulla Babu, 'but their faith is waning. Most of them do not believe that charkha is our only salvation, though they do believe in the economic value of it. Some of us feel that it is unnecessary to be

Congress members. Pray clear our doubts and fortify our faith if you can.'

I can but summarise the sermon that was the result of these doubts.

'I must tell you in the first place that I have never said that charkha is our only salvation. I have said that Swaraj for the masses is impossible without the charkha. But I am prepared here to advance the first also. I would ask you to exercise your imagination. And just as you visualise gods and goddesses on the Himalayas because your mind is filled with sacredness, you will also visualise the tremendous possibilities of spinning if you fill your minds with the elaborate details of a successful working of the spinning programme. It requires a tremendous effort to keep things going as we are doing, much more to make millions spin. Every one of us will have to take charge of little details and be under exact discipline. Universalisation

of spinning means the automatic solution of many other questions. Take the untouchability problem. It is impossible to universalise the wheel without tackling untouchability. Do you know that the untouchables would have nothing to do with Khadi if we had not made them our own? They would say, 'what shall we do with Khadi when we are treated as untouchables?' And unless they co-operate you cannot achieve the full Khadi programme. And so also for the Hindu-Muslim question. The two things hang together. You can thus see that spinning also does lead to Swaraj.

'But I want to take you little deeper. Do you know the Government have their hands on every string of the violin, except one which is in my hand? That is non-violence. You can win Swaraj only with non-violence and never with violence. If you are convinced of that, you will not take time to be convinced that by spinning alone can you win Swaraj. For

non-violence in action can be achieved by nothing but a successful working out of a peaceful programme of the universalisation of the spinning-wheel. How will you solve the Hindu-Muslim question, but by getting the Hindu to work in the cause of Khadi for the Mussalman, and *vice versa*? And in order that you get the Mussalman and the Hindu and the untouchable to work together, you have to plod away in faith and confidence in yourselves. Take first smoothest channels, leave the difficult ones alone. These are the Maharajas, Nawabs, etc. Let us fill the land with a net-work of expert carders and spinners and make the whole programme. Don't say the spinning wheel, the centre of the atmosphere, is spoiled. Let there be dissensions. You will spin in spite of them. And you will see that all about you would be spinning like you one day. If you are clean, all about you are bound to be clean one day. Shall I say good-bye to

*Brahmacharya*, truth and *ahimsa*, because the opposite is going on all around me? No, I must work away in the faith that my method is right even though I may be the sole representative of it.

‘And how will the spinners bring Swaraj?’ you ask. I say, nothing will need to be done after you have universalised the spinning wheel. You will have acquired a power and a strength which everybody will automatically recognise.

‘But possibly the struggle before us may be long. There is no shorter cut. I can make the Congress hum with a thousand genuine workers. A million non-spinners whose sole business is to give four annas each will be worse than an encumbrance. I have faith in God and in the fact that the few shall set when the time comes.’

### III

Impressions rush in upon my mind as I attempt to put together the most salient of them during the tour

more through urban East Bengal than through rural -the places visited being almost all the principal towns of the Districts. From Chandpur to Chittagong and back again to Noakhali, and thence to Comilla and Dacca, and thence up north to Mymensing is quite a considerable area. And yet there was nothing like a rush. There were on an average three to four meetings a day, and a plethora of addresses everywhere, but the meetings were, without a single exception, so orderly and those who presented the addresses so considerate that there was not much of a strain on Gandhiji. Thanks to Satish Babu's genius for organisation and his detailed and elaborate instructions, there were no shouts, no noises, no rowdiness. Everything showed a scrupulous economy of time, and sense of proportion. There were, for instance, 7 addresses at Noakhali. No one insisted that they should all be read, or that even one should be read in its entirety. At Dacca more



functions were squeezed in than could be physically managed, and those in charge readily cancelled the comparatively less important items. Regarding the addresses and the caskets, I am thankful to note that Gandhiji's wishes were complied with to a great extent. The caskets were, in almost all cases, of delicately artistic indigenous workmanship, and not very costly. With the exception of the address at Dacca every one contained facts and figures as accurately set out as possible, at least two or three were scrupulously pruned of ephithet, and whilst a majority were in Bengali, at least four were in Sanskrit and three in Hindi. Though Gandhiji, out of his partiality for the youthful old man Babu Hardayal Nag, has called the Chandpur address a most remarkable one, the one that, to my mind for detailed information, could easily carry off the palm was Comilla Peoples' Address and the one which was an agreeable surprise for the facts given was the

Comilla Students' Address. I summarise it as it is an example students everywhere should copy. "Two p. c.," said the address, "wear pure Khadi; 6 p. c. wear mixed Khadi; 20 p. c. wear half Khaddar dress and half milldress; 2 p. c. spin regularly; 20 p. c. know spinning; average count varies from 10 to 12; and one loom is worked by a student". 'How did you get these details? Is there any accuracy about them. Or is it mere guess-work?' asked the friends who were responsible for them. 'We took a census of *all* the students of the place, got every one of them to state facts required honestly and accurately, they were also thoroughly checked, and poor as are the results obtained, we are glad that we are placing' before Mahatmaji the real state of things,' answered one of them. And that last sentence sums up the spirit in which everything has been presented to Gandhiji during the whole of this East Bengal tour. 'I see many of you Khaddar clad. no

doubt, but most of you are wearing it for the occasion,' he said to some of the ladies. And they did not want to disguise the fact. 'What sort of Khaddar is this?' he asked a schoolmaster about the Khaddar on the persons of girls in a school. 'It is all half-Khaddar, Sir,' replied he regretfully. 'How many of you are, after my address, convinced that spinning is an essential part of national education?' was a question put to Chittagong boys after he had given them a heart to heart chat and demonstration on *Takli*. Only those raised their hands who knew the implication of the assent. 'How many of you think that you should spin?' he asked the students in Dacca. All except two raised their hands. 'Spin *regularly* half an hour every day?' he asked again making his question clearer. Down went the hands of nine, only one being a regular spinner. These details are an eloquent testimony of the spirit that is coming upon us slowly but surely.

Of all the meetings, those with the ladies stand out most prominently on the memory. There is not a place which I can recall where one sister or more have not come to Gandhiji with presents of Khaddarpieces—*dhoties*, towels or table-cloths—some woven by themselves, and all woven out of yarn spun by themselves. At Chittagong, just as Gandhiji was leaving, a young girl came with a beautiful towel of her own spinning and weaving. At Noakhali two *dhoties* were presented to Gandhiji woven of yarn spun by 60 ladies of a village who fasted and prayed and devoted the whole of the fourth “Gandhi day” to spinning! At Chandpur most of the ladies made it a point to come with yarn of their own spinning, and at Mymensing hundreds of ladies attended the meeting in spite of heavy showers of rain and spontaneously offered gold bangles and other ornaments along with yarn. The meetings far from being regular pandemoniums, as in other parts of India.

were, with possibly one exception, models of silent and attentive gatherings. Along with every one of these meetings, there was a spinning demonstration which one could not leave without added faith and hope. Hundreds of sisters have I seen 'slaving away at their wheels,' as Gandhi-ji said. In some cases, it was a wonder how with their wretched wheels they had patience to spin. But in spite of the bad wheels, the yarn in most cases was uniform and regular and fine which showed that the women of Bengal (as even men) have not yet lost the cunning of their fingers. If the wheels in all these parts were better and there was better organisation, Bengal would easily produce more Khadi, and with the exception of Andhra better Khadi, than any other province. That means days and nights of toil for Satish Babu and the other Khadi workers of Bengal who have, in addition to carrying out a thorough charkha reform, to banish the bastard Khadi'---the halfspun

Khadi—which, like the water hyacinth in Bengal, threatens to be a formidable pest.

One is tempted to summarise the talks with the students. But it is an impossible task. Everywhere they were fortunate in drawing Gandhiji into a long intimate chat. The Chittagong students heard from him how essential was spinning for Indian students as naval training was essential for every English boy, and swimming and boating for every East Bengal boy. The Comilla students had a definition of national education from him. That education is national, said he, which educates in you a sense of fellow-feeling for all your countrymen, which teaches you to melt at the woes of your countrymen wherever they may be. That education is national, which makes you think in the terms of the nation, which makes you calculate not how a particular thing will benefit you individually, but what it means for the nation as a whole.

And nothing was so universally useful as the spinning-wheel. At Dacca the students meeting was cancelled, but Gandhiji asked the students to come and have a chat after all the public functions were over, and they had more than they could even in their wildest dreams have expected. Gandhiji, always at his best when provoked, unbosomed himself when a friend objected that spinning was a waste of energy and time, and another, that his advice took no count of the principle of division of labour. 'Do I ask you to do spinning for the whole of the day? Do I ask you to take it up as a substantive occupation? Where, then, is the breach of the principle of division of labour? Do you have a division of labour in eating and drinking?' he passionately asked. 'Just as every one of us must eat and drink and clothe himself, even so, every one of us must spin himself.' 'And it is a waste you say? Fellow-feeling for your countrymen, you say, you have in an abundant measure?

And what is that fellow-feeling, without the milk of human kindness? Do you feel anything like the love that a cow feels for her calf or a mother for her baby? The cow's udders and the mother's breast overflow with milk at the sight of their young ones. Do your hearts overflow with love at the sight of your famished countrymen? By spinning, my friends, you demonstrate your love for them. You spin and you make them shake off their idleness. A friend goes and beautifully sings before a crowd and affects their hearts. Is it a waste of effort? It would be, of course, if he vainly howls *Vande Mataram* before them. But spinning means more. It has purpose and it means added production. The purpose is that it serves as a bond with the masses. And the mechanical effort has something as its result, whilst there is absolutely nothing like it which all alike can do without much effort and skill, nothing which can be done by millions, by the best of us as by the



mediocre. And the students should all do it particularly because they are the salt of the earth. Their life is yet to begin, they can imbibe new ideas as no one else can; and they have long years of service before them. You can put new wine into new bottles and not into old. And imagine what a disciplined band of students with fire, energy and reason can do. Imagine what a mighty thing it would be, the product of a half hour's labour given to hand spinning by everyone of the 11,000 students of Dacca! And do you know that if you all wear Khadi the spinners get a major part of the money you spend? You will perhaps think of England with her elaborate machinery. But she lives on the exploitation of other nations. She has conquered our labour. It is an economic drain which is even more disastrous than the Home charges and other drains that Dadabhai Naoroji opened our eyes to. Even he could not see this insidious drain, but, I being his disciple working along his

lines, have discovered this subtle drain and say that economic drain involved in our being made a nation of idlers is the most ruinous of all.' And so on and so forth, until he brought them face to face with the havoc this enforced idleness has wrought on the fair face of land - the famishing of Jagannath Puri and the impoverished of Behar and the women in other parts to whom an anna per day is a coveted God-send. There is nothing which I have heard from him for many a long day which can exceed this talk in melting pathos and incisive appeal.

But even at some of the public meetings where he spoke in English out of consideration for the lamentable "insatiation of the Bengali" for English, he broke all record. I am not sure that the effect from the point of view of Hindi propaganda has been altogether wholesome, for many went away almost reassured that it was after all well that Gandhiji spoke in English, as he could not have spoken so

well in Hindi ! I shall ask the readers to be satisfied with reports in the daily press of the speeches at Chittagong, Dacca and Mymensing. Some sentences are still ringing in the ears. 'Understand that the slavery of India is coarser than the coarsest Khaddar, understand that the pauperism of India is infinitely coarser than the coarsest Chittagong Khaddar,' he said winding up his passionate utterance at Chittagong. At Dacca he paid a gracious compliment to the District Board Chairman, who recited *verbatim* the English address, and said : 'I prize all this ; but I prize more the unwritten language of the heart and I want you to find a warm corner in your heart for my message. You talk of the departed glory of Dacca. It is for you to shed a *real* tear for that departed glory.'

Throughout his speeches in Travancore and in East Bengal, he has scarcely omitted to refer with regret to the absence of either of the Ali Brothers during the tour.

But in Noakhali he found some Mussalman friends who asked if the Brothers' absence was not significant, and ever since he has been making pointed reference to it. At Mymensing he could hardly contain himself when the Mussalman chairman of the District Board referred to the question in his address, and there was evident tremor in his tone when he said: 'I am feeling forlorn without either of the Ali Brothers. For with them I would have felt absolutely safe, through them I would have easily reached the Mussalman heart.' And in the same speech, which was devoted mainly to the Hindu-Muslim question, he referred with holy indignation to the Hindus and Muslims fighting amongst themselves as fighting not even for loaves and fishes, but for stones, fighting like the proverbial dog, not for the bone but for the shadow, and he reiterated his remedy of perfect surrender—'perfect surrender which is selfishness double-distilled, but which is surrender not of

essential, vital things but of unessential things.' 'The Hindu and the Mussalman must each add a common article to his creed, *viz.*, that he can never live without the other.' And he was sure that 'God who has placed together 7 crores of Mussalmans with 22 crores of Hindus, will have some mercy on us; and will make us live as brothers in spite of ourselves.'

At Chittagong the cloth merchants found him out and at a spècial function presented an address, in reply to which he said: 'I am sure that India was lost through the merchants and I am equally sure that we shall also recover it through them. We are not going to recover it through the educated classes. Nowhere in the world has liberty been won merely by the educated classes. It has been won either by the merchants or by the soldiers. But we lost our liberty through our merchants, and we shall have it back also through them. When we have our mer-

chants' full and hearty co-operation, Swaraj will automatically come to us.' The zemindars met him at Mahajanhat and Mymensing. At Mahajanhat Gandhiji was the guest of five zemindar brothers who already wear Khaddar and in whose households the ladies regularly spin. At Mymensing we had the privilege of the Maharaja's hospitality. He does not usually wear Khaddar, nor do his officers and servants. But his Hindu culture told him that the 'hospitality would not be complete without Khaddar. He not only wore it himself, but got all his employees, high and low, to wear Khaddar for the occasion, and all the furniture in his palatial guest-house was upholstered with Khaddar. Many other zemindars also came and saw him. Many of them were dressed in Khaddar and it is remarkable that they discussed also nothing but Khaddar. 'If you have your own *dhobi*', he told them, 'your own scavenger, why don't you have your own weaver? And

for fine, beautiful yarn, you can get the services of the finest spinners in your parts.' 'Why do not leading men and educated men, take to the charkha?' they asked. 'Because', said Gandhiji, 'they do not feel for the poor, and they do not feel because they do not know the sufferings of the poor. Please do not say they are lazy. We have helped them to become idle.' 'How to create interest in them?' 'You and I and all must plod on night and day and not be impatient like the boy who planted the mango seed and would not even wait for six months for the seed to take root and grow into a tree.'

## IV

Still better things were awaiting us in North Bengal. From Dinajpur to Bogra and thence to Talora and Pabna was a chapter of surprises. At all these places the number of spinning members was larger than the non-spinning ones.

Babu Jogendra Chandra Chakravarti of Dinajpur is an M. L. C., who is respected by pro-changers and no-changers alike if such a difference still exists. The spinning demonstration that he has arranged as part of the public meeting was rightly described by Gandhiji as a sight for the gods to see. Even as one's heart is thrilled to visualise the democratising virtue of Islam in a congregation of Muslims of all ranks and status doing their *namaz* of an evening, it was a thrilling sight to see the democratising power of the *Charkha* in old men and little children, Hindu and Mussalman, swarajist and no-changer, *vakil* and *zemindar*, rich and poor, untouchable and Santhal all sitting in the centre of meeting filling it with the music of the spinning wheel.

Here, as in two or three other places the organisers seemed to be keen on maintaining the *purdah* against all but Gandhiji, and I cannot hence speak of



the women's meetings. But I have no doubt that they were as good as elsewhere. The meeting of the 'untouchables' at Dinajpur was probably the best of all the meetings of these classes I have seen during the tour. The ground was beautifully swept up before their humble cottages and they were seated, silent and all attention, round the little mud-platform they had made under the shade of a beautiful tree. The address was, of course, in Hindi, and narrated their grievances in blunt, direct language. Here in Bengal you find these classes more conscious of their strength and rights than perhaps any where else in India. I do not think I have described before the pleasant spectacle of three sections to the 'untouchables' presenting separate addresses to Gandhiji at Chittagong and one claiming that they were no worse than other Hindus inasmuch as they had tabooed among other things even widow re-marriages, and another

complaining against the *Bhadrologs* treaching upon their exclusive right to so fish ! Things are far smoother in Bengal in this respect and there is no doubt that they will adjust themselves in the course of time. Gandhiji had, therefore, nothing more to tell them than that they should not get restive ; that they should take comfort in the thought that the condition was much better than many of their brethren elsewhere ; and that they could, if they chose, send a notice to the Municipality that they were going away leaving the conservancy work to the mercy of gods, if their demands were not granted, bearing in mind, however, that they had come and settled there of their own accord and not at the invitation of the Municipality !

At Bogra the pleasant experience of Dinajpur was repeated. There were young and old, municipal councillors and the chairman, lawyers and their clients spinning side by side. Among these was

family which had not for some years purchased cloth from the market, making their charkhas yield all the cloth required. The girls of a school had cloth woven out of their yarn to be presented to Gandhiji and a young man presented a *dhoti* woven by him out of beautifully fine yarn spun by himself. The wheels here were very much better than elsewhere and the slivers of course were of the best cleaned and carded cotton. There was a quiet little function at a worker's school conducted by Jain Babu, a Brahmachari, who has by now prepared and sent out for work scores of young men. 'I shall not speak to you,' said Gandhiji there, 'on the *charkha*. You know what I have been saying elsewhere. I shall, however, tell you something about *Ahimsa* in order to strengthen your faith in it. A student at Dacca told me that he would more willingly face the gallows than ply the wheel which afforded no excitement. I have no doubt that he believed neither in

*Ahimsa* nor *Brahmacharya*. For the wheel is an emblem of peace and *Ahimsa*, and I have pinned my faith to it because *Ahimsa* is not a policy with me, but a creed, a religion. Why do I regard it as such? Because I know that it is not *Himsa* or Destructive energy that sustains the world, it is *Ahimsa*, the Creative energy. I do admit that the Destructive energy is there, but it is evanescent, always futile before the Creative which is permanent. If the Destructive one had the upper hand all the sacred ties—love between parents and child, brother and sister, master and disciple, rulers and ruled,—would be snapped. *Ahimsa* is like the Sun whose worship as the symbol of God, our Rishis immortalised in the *Gayatri*. As the Sun “keeps watch over man’s mortality”, going his eternal rounds and dispelling darkness and sin and gloom, even so does *Ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* inspires you with love than which you cannot think of a better excitement. And that

is why my faith in the wheel, which is a symbol of peace and love, is increasing as I grow older. And that is why I do not think I am committing an impropriety in spinning whilst I am talking to you. As I am turning the wheel, I am saying to myself; 'Why does God give me my daily bread, whilst He starves multitudes of men? Let him starve me also, or enable me to do something to remove their starvation.' And as I turn it I am practising *Ahimsa* and truth which are the obverse and reverse of the same coin. *Ahimsa* is my God, and Truth is my God. When I look for *Ahimsa*, Truth says 'Find it out through me;' When I look for Truth, *Ahimsa* says, 'Find it out through me.'" So the rhapsody easily became one on Charkha and *Ahimsa* instead of that on *Ahimsa* alone.

Talora is one of the nine centres of Dr. Ray's Flood Relief activities. Just as it was reserved to the Sikhs and the Borsad peasants to carry out a successful

experiment in Satyagraha in the absence of Gandhiji, it was reserved to Dr. Ray and his patriotic band headed by Babu Satish Das Gupta to put into practice all the suggestions about prevention of famine by means of the Charkha fore-shadowed by Gandhiji, and in his absence. And his joy knew no bounds as Dr. Ray and Satish Babu narrated to him the story of their labours in 1923 and 1924. As soon as the flood-stricken were ensured shelter and clothing, Satish Babu and his co-workers brought the Charkha in to help them to stand on their legs and to depend no more on the doles of Relief Committees. Three thousand such Charkhas were supplied in a field from where the Charkha had long disappeared, and as a result of these busy wheels from May 1924 onwards up to now the area has received every month on an average Rs. 4,000 in the shape of spinning and weaving wages.

We saw Satish Babu's workers, every

one of the thirty two present, spinning at the rate of over 400 yards an hour, well-twisted yarn of over 15 to 20 counts—Mian Jan among them reaching a record of 720 yards. This Mian Jan was thus introduced to Gandhiji by Dr. Ray: “This is a Mussalman boy and one of my pet boys. Whenever I come here on my monthly visits I bring sweets for these boys. Once, the day on which I went happened to be a Gandhi-Day, *Gandhi punyaha* as we call it. I had brought the usual sweets and offered them to Mian Jan. He said, ‘No, much as I would like to have them, I cannot take them today as I am observing the *punyaha*—(sacred day).’” Bogra District has 8 p.c. of its population Mussalmans, and no wonder that the women and little girls who had come for the spinning demonstration were almost all Mussalmans. And it was a perfect sight to see them at the wheel. A seven year girl was pulling away the yarn at the rate of 500 yards or more

an hour. Gandhiji stood before her for some minutes. She would not look up. He pulled her ear and asked, 'Do you know Mahatma Gandhi?' She refused to make reply, whilst a little neighbour of hers said she did not know who he was! There were amongst women some as old as eighty and some who had almost lost their eye-sight. One could not help shedding tears of joy as one of them proudly said that the Charkha was bringing her Rs. 8 a month as a result of her and her child's labour. No wonder Gandhiji sighed for the Ali Brothers' company that day. His joy was not complete without the Brothers sharing it with him.

Pabna, the last place in the tour, was another surprise. Babu Jogendra Maitra, the wealthy zemindar of the place, was Gandhiji's host. He met us at the station bubbling with enthusiasm and insisting, in spite of Gandhiji's protests, that the latter must submit to the programme laid



down by the Reception Committee. 'But please listen to me,' said Gandhiji, 'It will be too much of a strain, on me.' But he would not listen, and one could see just a shade of temper over Gandhiji's face as he said, 'I submit to you.' But this little jar was more than recompensed when Jogen Babu presented to him his, and his wife's—who by the bye is a sister of Mr. Tulsi Goswami—and his children's yarn, all of a uniform and very high count, and also a *dhoti* woven out of the yarn spun by them in twenty days. Nowhere in our tour have we seen such fine Khaddar. There was a heavy programme to be gone through, but thanks to Jogen Babu's keen time-sense, it was all punctually carried out. In the midst of dozens of little items on the programme was an interview with the members of the *Nari-Shilpa Mandir*. Purdah is strictly observed but these ladies who came to see Gandhiji were kind enough not to mind our presence. They presented Gandhiji with

a *dhoti* and a beautiful red bordered *Sari* which they said was specially woven for Mrs. Gandhi—both, of course, of their own yarn. There was a Mussalman sister with *burkha*. ‘No purdah before your brother,’ Gandhiji gently said to her, and immediately she removed the veil! And as they were rising to leave they asked for a message. ‘What message am I to give you?’ said Gandhiji ‘you are all spinning and wearing Khaddar. I hope you will keep it on and convert more sisters and be like Sita and Savitri of old.’

As we were returning from Pabna a friend thus described Jogen Babu to Gandhiji: ‘He had not much interest in non-Co-operation, and was taking practically no part in politics. But since your emphasis on Khaddar, he has thrown himself heart and soul into the movement, as he believes in religiously spinning and wearing Khaddar. There are many such whom the moral and

Khaddar part of your programme appeals very much, whilst some of the Non-Co-operators are tired of it. 'I prize the spinners and Khaddar lovers' said Gandhiji, 'For the moral and Khaddar part is the permanent part of my programme whilst the other parts though valuable are of temporary interest.'

## V

We next visited Burdwan and Hooghly. There is nothing new to record about this visit. There were, of course, little items of interest. Though there was not much yarn presented or many good spinners at the demonstration, there was one gentleman at Burdwan who came with a present of his beautiful cloth spun and woven in the family, and who said that for three years they had purchased no cloth from the market and had determined never to do so in future. We saw also Mr. Mahomed Yasin, M.L.C. a middle-aged gentleman and probably

the swiftest Swarajist spinner we have seen. 'If you continue to spin so well, I shall have to seek entry to the councils' said Gandhiji complimenting him. At Hooghly, Gandhiji met the Arambagh workers who had come tramping twenty two miles from their field of activities, with loads of Khaddar and yarn and spinning bows in drenching rain! It is an exceptionally unhealthy area they have chosen. But no disease or discomforts would deter them from their mission, and they are steadily working away, twenty two miles in the interior from Hooghly, the nearest Railway station. They have given 45 spinning members and 30 non-spinning members.

We returned to Calcutta by boat. From the boat we could see both the banks of the Hooghly studded with magnificent mansions, and disfigured by chimneys of mills, belonging to the foreign jute merchants who have made fortunes whilst the village jute-grower barely eked

## IN BENGAL

out a living. The fact that our boat, the use of which we owed to the good offices of a friend, was lent by one of these jute-merchants, suggests a comforting reflection that one near day it may be possible to persuade them to treat the village jute-grower better than hitherto.

The visit to Shantiniketan was a boon and a solace. For, as Gandhiji said at Bolpur, it was a pilgrimage to the paternal roof where all the love of the fatherly Borodada, the elder brother of the Poet, and of the bosom friend Andrews was awaiting him. There were of course very long talks with the Poet who was anxious to understand things first-hand from Gandhiji, as he had been long out of India and as he proposed to go abroad very soon. He wanted Gandhiji to tell him what he meant by his claim to be a Sanatani Hindu, whether he believed in *Varnashrama*, and if he did, what it was; what were the implications of the Untouchability Reform and the

Charkha and Khaddar. Finally, the Poet wanted to know Gandhiji's view of Swaraj and the means he adopted to achieve it. I am unable to give the reader the gist of the two days' conversations as they were, and were intended to be privileged.

The meeting with Borodada was unique in many respects. When Gandhiji went to jail Borodada possibly feared that he might not survive Gandhiji's release. He was not only released but had gone to see him. On the other hand, Gandhiji's anxiety to see Borodada was very great as he had received news of Borodada's failing health. The partiarch was all excitement and what he said and did was overflowing with love. Gandhiji could not bear to sit in a chair—side by side with the venerable Borodada. Even as he sat at the feet of Dadabhai Naoroji some thirty-five years ago, he sat down at the feet of Borodada. 'Whatever I may

be to others, I must descend from my heights here at least and shed my Mahatmaship!' he said to Borodada who insisted on his sitting in the chair. And for three days morning and evening he listened, as a child to his father, to Borodada who showered his choicest blessings on him. 'I know you will conquer' he said at the first meeting, 'I know the stuff you are made of.' He was overpowered with emotion and could say no more. At the next meeting, he talked 'uninterrupted for the best part of an hour, blessing every item of Gandhiji's programme with a fervour and force I had never witnessed in him before. 'Out of the fullness of heart the mouth speaketh,' and it was useless trying to restrain him. To him it was not only "bliss to be alive in that dawn" of Swaraj, "it was very heaven" without being young. 'Faith that overcomes mountains is the first step to knowledge—so say the Shastras,' said Borodada. 'You started with that faith,

and to-day you are never afraid as you are in possession of the Bliss and Brahman', was the text he repeated times without number. 'I have faith in you. I have faith in God. My faith in you is only next to my faith in God,' said Borodada. 'What a pity!' said Gandhiji laughing, overwhelmed by the extra-ordinary love. 'Before truth and *Ahimsa* all Avidya will disappear,' went on Borodada. 'What is Avidya to-day but Imperialism and Bolshevism and all the other isms? They will all be shattered under the bombshell of Truth. We cannot fight them with their weapons. You cannot beard the lion in his own den. But Mahatmaji, *you* forged your own weapons. Charkha is *your* weapon, not theirs, *Ahimsa* is *your* weapon and not theirs and therefore they will be conquered. Even if there is discomfiture all around, and fire and sword dealing destruction everywhere, I am sure you will stand unscathed and uninjured like that fabled bird Phaenix



rising ever again from its own ashes. And nothing that you do is lost. Buddha lived 2,500 years ago and though Buddhism was swept out of the land later, even today the *Ahimsa* that we have inherent in us from generation to generation, is Buddha's legacy. Work on in faith. I was thinking the whole day as to what to tell you and the light that He gave me after prayers I have placed before you. But what am I? I am but an humble instrument. It is the Shāstras that I am repeating and have less right to repeat them than you. But I could not contain myself and have, therefore, prattled away like a baby.'

'Is not this tiring?' asked Gandhiji. 'Less tiring than other talks' he said emphatically, and again repeated the sentiments he had uttered,—this time with even more vigour and vehemence than before. 'All those that oppose you will disappear like the bubbles of time. Truth will conquer and I can see defeat

written on their foreheads.' It was long before this 'Trumpet of a Prophecy' was silent, the final words being 'I am speaking all this in the exuberance of joy. I have seen with my own eyes things I dreamt of but never expected to see—. *You* are making me speak so. You have taken away my gloom and I hope that the memory of these days may pull me safe through the dreary journey, through the desert that may still be before me.'

The third day was a day of leave-taking sad and sacred. I must not attempt to describe it.

The visit was a god-send to Gandhiji, for it gave him the rest of body and soul he needed so much. I have no doubt that it was of some benefit to the members of the Shantiniketan too. They had a heart to heart chat with Gandhiji and they understood, they said, the message of the *Charkha* better than they did before. Already there are some Charkhas working there. There is

an old Mussalman lady, the mother of a Vishvabharati Professor, giving all her spare time to spinning and getting her own cloth made out of her yarn and I should not wonder if as a result of the visit there will be as many more wheels plying than ever before.

## VI

At the instance, primarily, of Desh-bandhu Das Gandhiji consented to combine a brief holiday at Darjeeling with the briefer one at Shantiniketan. And it was all to the good. Cloud and sunshine, weather fair and stormy play eternal hide and seek there, and if only the gods are merciful you can see the snowy peak of Kanchanjunga. They were merciful for two brief intervals during the five days that we stayed there, but they were more bountiful in another respect. We got there what we never expected. Who would expect to come upon a Charkha expert in Darjeeling? But we did. The

gentleman came with his Charkha and samples of yarn he had spun on it and which had won prizes. He had given years to perfect the little machine and indeed his yarn was perfect. But when Gandhiji sat down along with him spinning at the ordinary Khadi Pratisthan Charkha, he found that his machine was not capable of yielding more than 300 yards an hour. It had thus no advantage over the orthodox wheel which in expert hands yields up to 800 yards. Nevertheless Gandhiji encouraged him to go on with his efforts to perfect the machine. Another surprise was given by a Bombay Doctor—Mussalman—come there to recruit. He and his wife were spinning every day and the stock of his good slivers had run short. His Charkha too was giving some trouble, and Satish Babu and I did an honest two hours' work mending his Charkha and helping him in other particulars. It may be of interest to note that Dr. Rajab Ali is not a non-

co-operator ; he is a J. P. and nominated member on many bodies, a University Examiner, and a Doctor in busy practice. But Khaddar appeals to him, he and his wife spin regularly and he handed to Gandhiji a handsome sum for Khaddar work.

But what is more, Gandhiji turned even the holiday to best account. He found in fashionable Darjeeling a number of new recruits. Deshbandhu's house became a centre of attraction not only because Gandhiji was there, but because it had become a spinning club. All the ladies in the house were spinning and naturally they infected the friends who came to visit them. Some took their first lessons and learnt the art and have ordered the wheels, and if the enthusiasm generated by Gandhiji's visit survives, I am afraid Mrs. Das will have a hard time, ordering Khaddar and wheels and slivers and teaching spinning, which we may hope she will be able to do before long.

One or two little anecdotes may be mentioned here. It is generally known that Gandhiji dislikes the photographer obtruding in every public function, if he does not regard him as a public nuisance I should not wonder if he comes to place in the same category the autographer—shall I say? The likelihood is, however remote, for he has found a most efficient way to deal with the latter. The way is that he charges a price for his autograph ‘My price, Sir, is moderate enough—half an hour’s spinning everyday for the country and a promise to wear Khaddar. At the mere mention of it some draw back, whilst some do pause and think. An Armenian friend purchased the autograph with a promise to wear Khaddar and spin. A young lady went away with her autograph-book, but came the next day after full deliberation, and vowed that she would fulfil the condition. “Thank you” said Gandhiji, here is my autograph’; and he wrote in her book

‘Never make a promise in haste. Having once made a promise fulfil it even at the cost of your life.’ And she got more than she had bargained for. On our way downhill a young man, possibly a student, held out his autograph book to Gandhiji. ‘Will you wear Khaddar and spin half an hour?’ He was flabbergasted. ‘But Sir Rabindranath Tagore has given me his autograph,’ he stuttered. ‘He is great and good,’ said Gandhiji smiling and the young man put his book back into his pocket without further argument.

There were meetings of course. Khaddar has found a permanent place in the Bengali ladies’ wardrobe, and many of those who do not habitually wear it use it for ceremonial occasions. Not that they wanted to meet Gandhiji and wore Khaddar for the time being. No. Gandhiji’s visit to Darjeeling was a sufficiently ceremonial occasion for them to be Khaddar-clad.

A most important function was the

meeting with some missionary friends. There is a little school of languages being conducted by Miss Rowlands. It is open only to missionaries serving in India and Gandhiji was invited to address them one morning. It was a quiet function, no more than a hundred people attending. Miss Rowlands in a brief felicitous speech gave Gandhiji the cue so to say. She welcomed him, she said, as the champion of the out-caste and the down-trodden as one who offered nothing but suffering in his own person, as a great servant of India, and if possible, a greater servant of suffering humanity. 'Please tell us then,' she said, 'how to serve Christ better.' It touched the deepest chords of his heart and he spoke from the very depths trusting that his message might reach not only their intellects but their hearts also. It is difficult to summarise it within the brief space. But if it is not unfair to do so I shall just try to recapitulate it.

He explained at the outset the natu



f his own mission. Whether it was politics or religion, it was pre-eminently mission of self-purification. And purification of the heart means a purification in all the departments of life which far from being like water-tight compartments are a beautiful whole. "For me, politics creft of religion are absolute dirt, ever to be shunned. Politics concern nations and that which concerns the welfare of nations must be one of the concerns of a man who is religiously inclined, in other words a seeker after God and Truth. For me God and Truth are convertible terms and if any one told me that God was a god of untruth or a god of torture I would decline to worship him. Therefore, in politics also we have to establish the Kingdom of Heaven."

Having thus cleared the meaning of his mission, he proceeded to answer Miss Rowland's appeal. Would it not be presumption to tell them how they, the bearers of the message of Jesus, could

serve Jesus better? But because there were Christian friends who regarded his activities with the greatest sympathy and even with approval, he would, in a humility, tell them what he thought. At recalling his Madras speech before the Christian Mission in 1916, he gave a frank and free expression to his view about the proselytising activity of missionary religions. "Proselytising has done some good, but it has perhaps been outweighed by the evil it has left behind. Whether you profess one religion or another is of no consequence whatsoever. What God will say, and want us to say, is not what we profess with our lips but what we believe in our hearts; and there is no shadow of doubt that there are thousands and thousands of men and women in the world who do not know the Bible or the name of Jesus or of His amazing sacrifice, but who are far more God-fearing than many a Christian who knows the Bible, offers his pray

regularly and believes sincerely that he follows all the Ten Commandments. Religion is made of sterner stuff, and it is impossible for us frail, weak human beings to understand what people mean when they say that they would be better if they professed something else from what they did." And he recalled his conversation with a South African chaplain who, after considerable questioning and cross-questioning, had told him that he would not thenceforth want to convert him." 'It is not he who says 'Lord' 'Lord', I told him, 'who enters the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth His will.' I reminded him 'I am conscious of my weaknesses, and try to fight them,—not in my own strength but in the strength of God. Is that enough or do you wish me to repeat parrot-like that Jesus had cleansed me from all sin?' He stopped me and said, 'I understand what you mean.' So I say that instead of wanting to find out how many heads

you count as Christian, work away like Sir Gibbie, silently among the people and let your work be the silent testimony of your worth. What do you want to convert them for? If your contact with them ennobles them, makes them forget untruth, all evil, and brings them a ray of light, is that not enough? Or in case you have taken charge of an orphan, if you feed him and clothe him, is that not enough? Is that not its own reward? Or must you have a mechanical confession from him that he is a Christian? We see to-day a rivalry, a war going on among different religions as to the number of adherents each can boast. I feel deeply humiliated and feel that in every one of the feats we claim to have performed in converting people to our faith we are denying our God and being untrue to ourselves. ”

Next he paid a glowing tribute to missionaries who had worked in the field of Indian vernacular literatures, opening ou

to Indians their hidden treasures, and congratulated the conductors of the Language School of Darjeeling. But that was hardly enough if they wanted 'to serve Christ better'. They must pick up the poorest portion of humanity and identify themselves with them, never seeking protection from temporal power, but ever glorying in the strength of God, 'penetrating the masses with your lives in the palms of your hands.' And in explaining what identification with the masses meant he drew a vivid picture of the ghastly skeletons under the shadow of Jagannath—a picture he has drawn more than once in *Young India* and is never tired of drawing over and over again. Thus came in the Charkha and 'the champion of the down-trodden and suffering humanity' delivered himself of his message.

This would be incomplete without a mention of one or two humble people who are working away in the ideal

manner described by Gandhiji in the speech just summarised. One of them was a Behari from Chapra, who waylaid Gandhiji at Siliguri and extracted a promise from him to stop an hour on his way back. (The Darjeeling Himalayan Light Railway begins at Siliguri.) Another was a U. P. friend from Ballia, keeping a little shop at Tindharia, at a height of about 3,000 feet on the Darjeeling road. He was clad in Khaddar and as he placed ten rupees in Gandhiji's hands, he explained that he was a reader of *Navjivan* (Hindi). On our way downhill the same man met again with his wife now, gave more than double the amount he had given, and had persuaded other friends also to come to the station. 'Who is this gentleman?' he said, pointing to the third occupant of our car. 'Satish Babu,' I said. 'Do you know him?' 'Oh yes', 'I read about him in the latest *Navjivan*.' Surprised Satish Babu asked. 'How many take in the *Navjivan* here?

‘Only I, said he ‘and I get two copies’ one for his file and another to circulate among the Hindi-knowing hill people. And as we were moving, he asked me where he could send from time to time contributions for Khaddar propaganda!

The Siliguri man was bursting with enthusiasm. He had arranged two meetings (men’s and women’s) and collected a purse of Rs. 425!

‘If I want others to work, I must work on, plod away, even though there may be no response for years,’ Gandhiji had said to the missionaries at Darjeeling. These two men were plodding away with something like that grim determination.

## VII

Next we proceeded to places in the North and East Bengal which could not be included in the first tour—Jalpaiguri in the extreme North and Barisal and Khulna in the extreme South—all District Head Quarters and Nawabgunj in Dacca

District and Jhapsa, Upasi and Madaripur in Faridpur District, all villages of the East Bengal type.

There were addresses, of course, at all places—Madaripur being possibly the worst offender, in as much as over three quarters of the time was taken up in reading about a dozen addresses which everyone concerned seemed particularly anxious to read. Jalpaiguri in this respect carried off the palm, copies of all the addresses being previously given to Gandhiji and all being taken as read in the public meeting. That saved a lot of time and permitted Gandhiji to make a longer speech than he usually does. The address that I still remember, and would commend as an example to be followed, was one given at a way-side station on our way from Jalpaiguri to Parvatipur. It was printed on beautiful hand-made paper and contained nothing more than this sentence : 'May the Giver of all good, crown your efforts to universalise Charkha



and Khaddar and to alleviate the poverty of the millions, with success.'

Jalpaiguri is a busy little town with its tea plantations which have brought the owners considerable money. 'Who is this gentleman?', I asked inquiring about a member of the reception committee. 'A Vakil' was the reply that came after some hesitation and then a hasty amendment: 'No, a tea planter,' I inquired about another friend with the same result. This time I got the explanation also: 'The tea business is a most profitable business bringing as much as 300 p.c. profit. Why should not all the vakils non-cooperate with lawcourts and be tea planters?' That also explains why the 'Khaddar business' has not very much appealed to them. But Gandhiji went there with three practical propositions. 'Either give me a fair share of your spoils,' he said, in effect, 'or your business talent, which I want you to use for the benefit of your country, or at least half an hour's

sacrificial spinning every day.' He knew that they were going to give a handsome purse of Rs. 7,000, Jogesh Babu's mother alone having presented 101 sovereigns when he visited his house. But he knew that the amount of Rs 7,000 was far from being 'a fair share of their spoils,' and he asked such as could give more, to do so. Every new enterprise had to be backed by large bounties. The Germans had spent millions to protect their beet-sugar industry, and they could protect theirs by backing it with the profits they made from their business.

And yet it is not that there are no spinners there. The villages in the vicinity are still humming with Charkha, only no one has organised them. There is a girls' school where there were a number of wheels and at the spinning demonstration there were many more, hardly one of which was possible. Before leaving Jalpaiguri he had a talk with the volunteers, most of whom were students

What else could Gandhiji have to say to them but about spinning? It was one of those dear, intimate, heart to heart chats. 'You say there is no fun in spinning. But I ask you, is there any fun in reciting the *Gayatri*? Is there any fun in reciting the *Kalama*? You do it as it is a duty, as it is a sacrament. Even so spinning is a duty and a sacrament. India is dying. It is on death-bed. And have you ever watched a dying man? Have you ever felt his feet? You find that they are cold and benumbed, though you still feel some warmth on the head and comfort yourselves that the life is not yet gone out of him. But it is ebbing away. Even so the masses of India—the feet of the Mother—are cold and palsied. If you want to save India, do it by doing the little that I ask for. I warn you. Take up the wheel betimes, or perish.' But I am afraid much of this was lost on them. The moment he mentioned the spinning

wheel, one of the chief workers came to me and said: 'Why does Mahatmaji mention the Congress resolution about spinning and the volunteers' pledge? These volunteers have signed no volunteers' pledge. They were enlisted just for the purpose of his reception.' And when he was in the midst of the closing sentences I have quoted, the chief among the volunteers came and requested me to ask Gandhiji to speak to them not on spinning, but on their duty to the country!

At Nawabgunj the pleasant experience of the first week in East Bengal were repeated. Here was another of the valiant band of science scholars who have dedicated themselves to the service of the country. Mr. Haripad Banner, hails from West Bengal and has chosen this area as his field of work, because he belongs to an institution which had first its head quarters at Dacca and now at Comilla (both places not very far from

Nawabgunj) viz. the Abhoy Ashram, itself an important Khadi producing centre in the Chittagong Division. Haripad Babu is in charge of the biggest national school in Bengal. Though not belonging to these parts, he has great influence over the people, as Prafulla Babu in the area about Malikanda. A major part of the purse of Rs. 7,000 collected by Prafulla Babu was from poor people, each contributing a rupee or a couple of rupees. Haripad Babu's area has more rich men than any other part of Dacca, and they have not yet taken enthusiastically to Khaddar and Charkha. But they gave him large amounts and made up his purse of Rs. 7,000; Khadi production in this area is necessarily less, and the number of spinning members only 28, but that for no fault of Haripad Babu who spares no pains and tramps through marshes and moors and malarial areas, ignorant of defeat. His boys all wear Khaddar and spin regularly and the

pieces of Khaddar exhibited were all of good yarn and of beautiful texture. It had rained heavily all night, and the school boys whom Gandhiji wanted to meet early morning before leaving could not keep their time and were late. Not more than five minutes could therefore be given them. 'You all spin and wear Khaddar,' said Gandhiji to them, 'but tell me how many of you always speak the truth and never lie?' A few boys raised their hands. 'Well, now tell me how many of you occasionally happen to lie? Two boys immediately raised their hands, then three, then four and finally, almost all. 'Thank you', said Gandhiji bidding them good-bye, 'there will be always hope for those of you who know and own that they occasionally lie. The path of those who think they never lie is difficult. wish both success.'

From Nawabganj we went to Jhabs the boat station for Upashi, the home of

two institutions to which Gandhiji has referred in his notes. The Bijhari school was indeed a revelation. I am told there is another such school in Jessore which is affiliated to the University, but which has spinning compulsory for all students. But so far as my knowledge goes there is no such school anywhere else outside Bengal. The reason is obvious. In Bengal the teachers and the taught in non-national institutions have not kept themselves aloof from the great movement. Many of them wish that they could do their share in it. That is why we find so many professors and teachers in aided or affiliated colleges and schools wearing Khaddar and at least two such schools having compulsory spinning. Gandhiji has written at length about the school. Only one thing I shall add. He has visited many a school up to now and put down his remarks in many a visit-book, but nowhere were his remarks so lengthy and detailed as in the visit-book

of the Bijhari School. I reproduce them for the benefit of the national schools which are already trying the experiment, and of the schools which may care to imitate the example :

“I was much pleased to note that spinning has been compulsory for the past four years. I have read the remarks of the Inspector about failure of spinning. I hold totally contrary views but I know that it is possible to make spinning absolutely self-supporting, if not profitable. To that end I venture to suggest the following.

(1) Existing teachers should be induced to learn the art and the science of spinning, on promise of prize or even a slight increment in pay.

(2) The yarn spun by the boys should be always tested and tickets attached giving the strength and count.

(3) Boys should be encouraged to improve the quality of their yarn from day to day.



(4) Yarn should be sold to the existing spinning organisations, such for instance as Khadi Pratishthan at agreed prices always above the price of cotton. To this end cotton may be taken from the same organisation.

(5) Weaving Department I do not hold as a necessity, and should be kept up only if the salary of the weaving master is earned from it. I am glad in this connection to have the promise that all foreign or mill-yarn will be henceforth dispensed with.

(6) Special attention should be paid to carding which the boys must be taught to do for themselves.

(7) The Charkhas make a great deal of sound foreign to them. This must interfere with good spinning. They can be and should be made noiseless. This is possible only when the spinning master knows the science of spinning which necessarily includes a knowledge

of Charkha repair. When the Charkhas work well they produce a musical sound which is soothing to the ear. They can be made a positive delight to the boys besides being a lesson in sacrifice.

I congratulate the Committee and staff on their experiment and wish them every success."

Madaripur was the next halt. Babu Suren Biswas, whose acquaintance we made in Faridpur, was here to greet us, this being his own village. Rarely one comes across such guileless, selfless men as Suren Babu. To know him is to love him. A non-co-operating lawyer and a swarajist, he refuses to make any distinction between a no-changer and a swarajist, and infects you with his charity. He had collected in little Madaripur vast crowds and yet all the arrangements were A.I. The women's meeting in which there were quite a couple of a hundred Charkhas plying was organised

by his indefatigable wife and was possibly the most successful we have yet seen. All communities were represented there including of course the Namashudras. It was a picture. And if there was anything wanting to make it complete, Suren Babu held the light to his wife who read the address, and when Gandhiji saw that Suren Babu was not standing near enough to give her sufficient light, he snatched the lantern from his hand and held it himself! And there was nothing excessive in that. She did deserve all that. Her faith in the Charkha is unshakeable and it is at the flame of her dauntless spirit that her husband has kindled his own.

The speech at the public meeting was devoted to the fallen sisters, some of whom were spinning in a corner of the meeting. "It is dangerous," said Gandhiji, "this association with fallen sisters, especially for young men. All that you need do is to entrust the work

to your women, guiding them from a distance. The volunteers in their address asked me to tell them how they could push on their work. They are all under the vow of Ahimsa, and as Ahimsa is love, I can show them where they can concentrate all their energies with love as their weapon. Let them, if they can, muster sufficient non-violence, take up the work of protecting these fallen sisters. Let them plead with the men who corrupt themselves and these women let them open these men's eyes to the bestial, diabolical character of their offence, and wean them from their evil ways. Let them form a Ladies Volunteers League for the reclamation of fallen women and work through them. You have said in your address that Madaripur has been marked out by Government as the chief among revolutionary centres. Well nothing short of a revolution is needed amongst the women of India to fight this evil and

may Madaripur lay the foundation of that revolution."

Barisal—the Barisal of Babu Ashwin Kumar Dutt—seems to have forgotten the legacy of the late patriot, and suffers from the regime of mutual jealousies and hatred. And yet the yarn produced for the occasion was astonishingly large. About 38 lakhs of yards of yarn was presented to Gandhiji—4 lakhs being contributed by women, 14,000 by a lad who did it in 15 days, 14,000 by a swarajist, several lakhs by the Mussalman weavers of Hussainabad, 36,000 by an old man of 60. A place where so much could be done, inspite of the foul political weather, could have done much more in fair weather.

The meetings with the Namashudras and the cobblers and sweepers were very interesting. The Namashudras had a catalogue of grievances which included amongst others illiteracy, poverty and the like. And Gandhiji had to explain

to them that the disease they mentioned was common to all and that the anti-untouchability movement aimed only at removal of untouchability and of evils springing from it *e.g.* refusal of service by the washermen and barbers and refusal to take water at their hands by those who take water at the hands of Shudras. The cobblers and sweepers had also a chat. 'Can't you give up liquor? is there any particular relish about it?' 'No Sir; but it is an age-long habit.' 'But if it is bad?' 'We would give it up at the instance of Mahatma like you.' 'Well then do you know that I am tomtoming everywhere the fact that I am a friend of cobblers and and sweepers and washermen. If you do not give up liquor, how can I be friends with you?' 'We will give it up.' 'And what about Khaddar? You say it is very dear. Well, if it is very dear, can't you put on a loincloth like I am doing? It is for your sake that I am putting on such

a short loincloth. Do you know that? 'We can, we can, Sir.' 'Now tell me how much your *dhoti* cost you,' he asked one of them. 'A rupee and two annas'. 'Then I can get you a cloth like mine for nine annas. Will you wear it?' 'We will, we will.' 'No false promises, mind you. And if you do all that, I will be telling everyone I meet that if they want to see real friends of mine he should go and meet the cobblers and sweepers of Barisal. Is it right?' 'Yes.' Before the meeting broke up, however, one of them put forward what to him was an immediate grievance. 'The Babus have given up wearing shoes Sir. How are we to live, if we have no customers?' 'Weave cloth' replied Gandhiji with a loud laugh. 'But why should we?' put in one very proudly. 'Why should we weave cloth and be false to our religion? Making shoes is our ancestral profession, and we cannot give it up.'

'I don't ask you to give it up. I say if

you have no customers and if you must find another occupation, weave cloth. But the idea itself was more than the man, so proud of his profession, could bear. 'But why should we? The Babu may do without shoes for some days. They cannot do so for ever.'

Father Strong of the Oxford Mission had invited Gandhiji to call on them and inspect their weaving. He paid a flying visit, and Father Strong showed him over the weaving shed. 'But this is all mill-yarn' he said to Father Strong, 'and you use mill-yarn you do not benefit the millions, but the millionaires. Weaving cannot be a cottage industry for the millions. For them the only supplementary occupation can be spinning. According to Lord Curzon the annual average income of an Indian was 30 Rupees according to our calculation it is 26. And if it is the average income of the mass excluding the classes the actual would be much less. Now if by spinning you can



add 10 rupees to this, would it not be a fortune to them? You may not miss 5 rupees, but to those who have nothing, 5 rupees is a fortune.' I am giving almost the exact words that he spoke, and he said no more. But the effect on Father Strong's mind was evident, as he declared his intention to try the introduction of the spinning-wheel through the lady-workers.

Khulna we visited under the shadow of the national calamity. The news of the Deshabandhu's death reached Gandhiji immediately on his arrival there and even he was unnerved for a time. All the functions except a general public meeting were dropped. The public meeting soon turned into a mourning function, and in the midst of the speech entirely devoted to the memory of Deshabandhu, Gandhiji utterly broke down. He soon collected himself no doubt, almost every one of his movements during the day was

mechanical. Even to him who has borne so many losses, the loss was unbearable of one who had 'made even Death proud to take him.

### VIII

I shall string together some episodes and incidents which I purposely omitted from my narrative, but which by themselves are worth chronicling.

Inspite of the newspapers being full of suggestions from certain quarters about the revision of the present franchise it was rather surprising that nowhere in Bengal was the question raised by friends who came to interview Gandhiji. But a friend did come questioning the whole of the Khaddar movement. 'We are repeating our past mistakes, Mahatmaji,' he said, 'In 1905—1908 we built a house of cards which broke down no sooner than it was put up and we are in for the same thing now.' 'You compare the earlier Swadeshi agitation with the present?

You forget that we have no fireworks now, but only quiet work.' 'I know it, sir, but there is no organisation.' 'Pardon me you are ignorant of the state of things. Do you know that we have the best organisations in Bengal, Tamil Nad and Gujarat for example? You think institutions like the Khadi Pratishthan and Abhoy Ashram, Comilla, are going to die?'

'But how will they go on? We are living on subsistence allowance and asking our young men to do with less. How long can it go on?'

'How long? Why, our whole history is replete with it. You think our young men have no grit? They have gone to their work with eyes open and they are not going to give it up, whatever happens. The Abhoy Ashram which I saw a few days ago is situated on a beautiful spot, they have got clean nice little huts, a beautiful tank and a plot of land. They cook their own food, do their own scavenging and make both ends meet from the

proceeds of a hospital. Dr. Suresh is a child, he knows his business and he will see that his Khaddar work goes on increasing every day, whatever happens to him and his co-workers. And Khadi Prathishthan, whose rates are very high you say, have at the present moment more orders than they can cope with. Look at Satis Babu's work. Have you ever been to the flood areas? From flood relief they have embarked upon permanent relief work. And I may tell you that Khadi Prathishthan does not believe in subsistence allowance. It pays its workers the market wages.'

'Well sir, it is your visit that has created a boom'.

"It does not matter. You may call it a blister. It will fall back to its normal state which is quite satisfactory. As you go to a yarn *hat*. Where only a few maunds of yarn was being sold, hundreds of maunds are being sold today. There are hundreds of families supplementing

if not earning, their livelihood from their Charkha. It is a sight to see how the workers are besieged by people asking for cotton to spin, on the market days. 'And if these workers retired from their field what would happen?' you may ask. But they cannot retire. They did not give up their fine careers for nothing. The Abhoy Ashram men have got three strings to their bow, a hospital from which they find the wherewithals and which Suresh Babu thinks of supplementing by a medical school—and he has got enough medical talents—and besides the Khadi work which is the main thing, they are running a big boys' school, hoping to have greater hold on the people through the boys. Then there are Pravartak Sangh workers. I do not know their work, but I know they are as many as 200 and they are working against tremendous odds."

'But there are only three such institutions,' said the questioner still unsatisfied.

By no means. There are many more

working away in their humble way if they were only three, what There are men like Jamnalalji, gopalachari, Shankerlal Banker, & all their twenty-four hours to the working with devotion and d pertinacity. They are working patience to wait for a century if nee and working with the desire to su to-morrow. And you do not know the Swadeshi movement of 19 differs from the present. It w movement magnificent in conce But it had no knowledge or organis behind it. It made the boycott of B cloth a shibboleth, and relied or broken reeds of the mills of Bomba Ahmedabad. Today you are gua against all the disasters that atte the earlier enterprise. Today you fair to show that if all the mills in were burnt down you can cloth whole of India by cloth produce your cottage spinners and weavers.

‘Let us not be too sure. You know of people who in those days had to hang themselves for want of cloth.’

‘You are talking of the days of Noah, my friend. Weavers were then deluded into the belief that they could not weave except with machine-spun or foreign yarn. Today I am asking the whole organisation to be taken into intelligent hands. No movement can be made universal unless it can be propagated entirely without foreign agency. But I ask you to study things; study the prices of Khaddar in the beginning of the movement and today; study the quality of it: study the yarn we are producing; in short, study the evolution of the Charkha and Khaddar, and then say what you have to say.’

‘Can’t we depend on the growth of our mill-industry?’

‘I have often shown in pages of *Young India* the fallacy of those who argue in favour of the mills and shall not

labour the point today. I do not want to depend on mills, I want the mills depend on me. That is the long and short of it.'

'We can have national mills.'

'Well, he who suggests a proposition must work it out himself.'

I do not know whether he went away convinced, but he apologised for having tired Gandhiji who assured him that one could tire him out on the Charkha.

I shall now take up two friends who engaged Gandhiji on the possibility of Hindu-Muslim unity. A Mussalman friend came with a long catalogue of grievances. First was untouchability as against the one observed by the Hindus; second, differences about Cow-slaughter; third, insufficient representation; fourth, books and pamphlets against Islam; fifth, newspaper reports about abductions and several other alleged crimes by Mussalmans; sixth, exclusion from services; seventh, exactions by Mahajans; eighth, *abv*



by zamindars for Kalipuja. Gandhiji showed him that some of the grievances were purely local, some were against particular individuals and some reciprocal, the real grievance was the first. And he immediately agreed that that was the principal grievance and others arose out of them. They do not even sell sweetmeats to us, Gandhiji,' said he. 'Yes I see it' said Gandhiji, 'That's a genuine grievance; but you should not, as you did in the beginning, magnify everything into a grievance suffered by Mussalmans as a community. I tell the Hindus that if they want to protect Hinduism by an elaborate law of pollution, then it had better perish. You cannot convert India into a *Jazirat-ul-Arab*. Hindus have in the days gone by absorbed all sorts of nationalities. I am sure we shall have to revise our code of pollution and remove the unnecessary barriers that strangle Hinduism rather than strengthen it. We were never exclusive, we were inclusive.

Its beauty is that it has never been a missionary religion like Islam or Christianity, ever counting heads. It has carried on absorption unconsciously, following a sort of natural accretion. 'Why', I ask my Hindu friends, 'why do we at this time of the day prevent sweetmeat sellers from selling sweets to Mussalmans when we have no objection to getting chocolates from a European confectioner?'

At another place came an ardent young man saying, 'you must do away with untouchability lock stock and barrel. 'What do you mean?' Gandhiji asked 'Of course' said he, 'the restrictions about interdining also must go.' 'You want people to dine out of the same plate?' 'No.' Then you seem to agree with me.' 'But Sir, don't you agree that people of different castes and creeds may dine sitting in the same room or same row?' 'They may. I do not call that interdining.' 'Well. Sir, why did you not force

your way into the temple at Cape Comorin, when they did not admit you? It was an insult you should not have put up with' said the young man flitting to another topic. 'You, Sir, are the light of the world and who were they to exclude you?' 'Yes,' said Gandhiji laughing, 'either I was not the light of the world and they were justified in keeping me out; or I am the light of the world and I should not have forced my way into it.' 'I see, Sir, I see, Do you think, Mahatmaji, Hindu-Muslim unity is possible when Maulana Mahomed Ali says an adulterous Mussalman is superior to Mahatma Gandhi?' Pardon me, he never said so. He said, he is superior in one respect *viz*, in his creed. His was only a picturesque way of putting it. And why can't you understand a simple thing? Supposing I have a *Kohinoor* diamond and some one says Gandhi is better than a zamindar in possessing the diamond *Kohinoor*, can't he say so? To every one his religion is the best in the

world, as to every chaste man his wife should be the most beautiful woman in the world. And in the same way Mahomed Ali said, any Mussalman was better than I in having a better creed.' 'Then really sir, he did not make the statement that I have read him to make.' 'You did not read it carefully. He said nothing of the kind. He even said I was better as a man than, for instance, his mother or his preceptor both of whom he adores. And it is a perfect statement that he made. But I agree there is another side to the question. A man's creed is good so long as he lives it, and a creed without the example is nothing. But Maulana Mahomed Ali was stating his position as a logician. The distinction he drew was a fatal distinction, but there can be no doubt as to its logical correctness.'

I shall come to lighter incidents. At Dacca an old Namashudra, aged about 70, was brought in before Gandhiji. He was wearing Gandhiji's photograph in his

neck and as soon as he saw Gandhiji he fell at his feet and crying profusely uttered his thanks over and over again for being cured of chronic paralysis. He said when all remedies had failed he took to uttering Gandhiji's name and one day found himself entirely cured. 'It is not I, but God who has made you whole,' said Gandhiji. But how could he believe? To him God had appeared in Gandhiji's photograph. It was vain to argue with him. 'But my dear man,' said Gandhiji, 'Will you not oblige me by taking that photograph off your neck?' That he readily did, and quietly walked away with the name of God on his lips and probably convinced that the man who had refused to take any responsibility for having cured him could certainly not be 'The Gandhi Maharaj' who cured him!

But credulity is not the monopoly of illiterate people. A Vakil friend was, the other day, travelling with us. As he was trying to get into his compartment

at a station his foot slipped off the foot-board and he fell head over heels. His son who was travelling by the same train pulled the chain and stopped the train and got his father back almost unhurt. The gentleman came to the next station to Gandhiji, narrated the mishap with bated breath and said he would not have been saved had not Gandhiji been travelling by the same train. 'Nor would you have met with the accident. Why not say that also?' asked Gandhiji. I hope he saw the point of the joke. The fact is that most people do not. For instance the vast masses of those who feel that the merest touch of Gandhiji's feet would purge them of their sins refuse to take Gandhiji seriously when he asks them not to do so. A sister, however, I saw in Chandpur stood quite apart from this general mass of humanity. She came along with a number of ladies. They all touched Gandhiji's feet, but she did not. She could not, however, help saying to

Gandhiji, by way of apology, that she did not touch his feet out of deference to his repeated wishes. But that was nothing as compared to what followed. She came the next day with some ladies who wanted Gandhiji to write something in their books. They belonged to the tribe of autographers. They were all spinners and Khaddar wearers. They could not be refused. But Gandhiji did not like those good country ladies having caught the infection of the civilised folk. And yet it was impossible to persuade them. The little sister came to the rescue. Don't you see what Mahatmaji says?' she imperiously asked the elder ladies. 'He says his message is there in *Navajivan* and in the speech that we heard today. What new message do you want? For me, Mahatmaji, I look at the spinning wheel and get your message; I look at a *bhang*i and get your message; I look at poor men and read your message in their eyes. I need not trouble to read even *Navajivan*.' She'

verily, had got the message and was living it. Her friends also now had it from her and retired quite satisfied.

## IX

The *Guardian* has very kindly observed that Gandhiji has during his prolonged stay in Bengal been able to dispel the fears of those who, never doubting his sincerity, had doubts about his friendliness to his opponents and critics. It is this feeling of relief which I suppose is shared by many European friends also that led up to the invitation to Gandhiji from the Rotary Club to address them on the 'Economic and Spiritual Value of the Charkha'. Gandhiji was rather chary of having that as the title of his subject, as he had fears that the word 'Spiritual' might alarm some. But the friends who personally came to give him the invitation,—Mr. James, the President and Mr. Weston, the Director of Industries,—insisted on the word 'Spiritual' rather than 'moral', and Gandhiji agreed.



The meeting which was held in Grand Hotel was in more respects than one a momentous one and perhaps unique in the history of the Club. The parent Club in America has over 40 branches in all parts of the world and has as its motto '*Service before Self*.' It has over a hundred thousand members, and only one branch in India *viz.* the Calcutta Branch. Sir Surendranth Banerjea who some years ago was invited to address the Club described it as a 'worldwide organisation helping to draw Europeans and Indians together.' It was thus in the fitness of things that the directors should have resolved to invite Gandhiji to speak to them—Gandhiji whom, as the President said, they welcomed as a great social reformer and as one who had 'throughout his life put service before self', and the pivot of whose activities was the spinning wheel. Every club has its reactionary element and it seems that the members who make

up this element questioned at the preceding meeting of the Club the propriety of the invitation and pronounced in favour of 'sacking' the whole lot of Directors concerned in inviting a man like Gandhi. But we are told the 'misguided' Directors were quite impenitent and went even a step further by having a strictly vegetarian luncheon in honour of the guest. There were no less than a hundred Britishers present, with a sprinkling of Indian guests, and it was a 'Ladies Day.' No wonder Gandhiji particularly appreciated the 'delicate courtesy' extended to him of making their luncheon a Bengali widows' luncheon, and the invitation to speak on a subject as uninteresting as the potato and cabbage menu spread before them.

I do not think it is necessary to repeat the economic argument about the Charkha. The readers of *Young India* are quite familiar with it. The claims of the *takli* (Dr. Besant's whirligig) which

Gandhiji carries about with himself wherever he goes as the competitor of the Spinning-mills, were as seriously listened to as they were advanced by the speaker. The mills could not possibly reach even a fraction of the millions living in the seven hundred thousand villages spread over the vast area of the country, most of them not even reached by the railway line. A tenth of the population lived on one meal a day consisting of dry bread and a pinch of dirty salt, and did not even according to the liberal computation of Lord Curzon get on an average more than Rs. 3 a month per head. "Does not a sum of Rs. 5 or 6 per month added to this paltry income mean a fortune to them? Well then the spinning wheel means that to the millions." It was the only thing that could be made universal, only thing which did not require any special skill to learn and which was a marvel of cheapness. The speaker frankly could not think of a device more

eminently fitted to solve the problem of the economic distress, famine and flood in India.

And if the economic argument was unassailable, the spiritual which flowed from it was equally so. If the mills made superfluous additions to the treasures of the already rich, the spinning wheel was certainly spiritually superior to it in as much as it filled the pockets not of those who were already rich but of the starving and the needy millions. "I read with deep interest" said Gandhiji, "Drummond's book on *The Natural Law in the Spiritual World* long ago, and I am sure that if I had that writer's facile pen, I would demonstrate even better that there is a spiritual law in the natural world." He had read books by sane men seriously advocating electrocution to end the race of the starving and the diseased and the infirm. It may be an eminently economical remedy, but it was not a human or a spiritual remedy. In

the spinning wheel he was offering to his countrymen a spiritual remedy, a remedy with which they had been familiar for ages, and a remedy which if seriously tried would save them from the hideous consequences that town and factory life involved. And need he say anything as to the spiritual reaction on the mind, of the simple instrument? Well, so many who had tried it bore witness to the fact that it brought peace to the distracted and troubled mind, and the genius of Goethe had woven that effect into song for ages, when he represented Margaret spinning away at the wheel and through its inspiration spinning out of her lips a song as perfect as the yarn from the wheel. He was not an enemy of inventions, said he, clinching the argument, but as matter misplaced was dirt, all inventions misplaced were abominations, to be shunned if they did not add to human dignity and peace.

Questions were invited by the President

as soon as Gandhiji concluded. I am afraid the debate was not as lively as one might have expected. Mr. Hobbs, the comic asset of the Club, did speak, but was ignored, and the Director of Industries betrayed his ignorance of the Bengal village when he said that yarn could never be a marketable commodity. He seemed for the moment to have forgotten his history when he said that home-spun could scarcely be woven into cloth. He should have known that hundreds of thousands of yards of cloth left the shores of India for export abroad when no one knew the use of the machine.

Gandhiji had studiously avoided the political aspect of the spinning-wheel throughout his discourse, but Dr. Sarbadhikari, a Rotarian, who spoke last, compelled him to do so. 'If the spinning wheel', he asked in effect, 'had played such a large part in Hindu ritual and was a living thing in the Bengali home, how had it fallen into disuse? Is it not the

cost of the product of the wheel which has driven it out?' 'That,' said Gandhiji, 'involved the spiritual aspect too. If he had the authority of Queen Elizabeth he would deal with the question just as she had done. She made it criminal for her people to use Holland lace, and imported workmen from abroad to teach the people how to make lace, and interdicted the use of lace until then. He was not an out and out free trader and he would, if he could, effectively stop all import of foreign cloth by heavy import duties. 'And you have asked,' said he, warming up, 'how the industry had died. Well, it is a painful answer, but I must give it. *It was made to die.*' He could have narrated the whole bloodcurdling tale which tarnishes the record of the East India Company, but he refrained. 'It would make the blood of every honest man and woman boil to turn over the pages written not by Indians but by the servants of the Company. When I tell you that people

had to cut off their thumbs in order to escape the terrorism set forth, you would understand the position. The Charkha was not living in every home as Dr. Sarbadhikari had said, it had been killed, and it was now being revived. Every country had to organise its industries, and it did not matter if they had to pay more for their products in the beginning'. 'Service before Self,' was the motto of the Club, and the speaker, reminding them of it said, "You are trustees of the welfare of the people of India. You will have to put service before self and teach them to feel that they should not have Manchester Calico or mill-made cloth when they can make cloth in their own homes." He instanced the competition between a foreign Steam Navigation Company and a British Company, where the former went the length of selling tickets almost free for deck passengers which once used to cost Rs. 91, and said "Healthy industry cannot stand tha



competition. You will educate the world opinion against such immoral competition. I want fair competition, and no favour." After this answer was given, I have no doubt Dr. Sarbadhikari did not regret having asked the question that he did.

## X

'Is it possible to love one's country and not to hate those who rule over it, whose domination we do not want and dislike from the bottom of our hearts?' was the problem, said Gandhiji speaking at a meeting in Overtoun Hall, Calcutta, 'with which the younger generation was faced today'. And the answer given by many, expressed in some cases and secretly nourished in most, was that it was impossible. As a student of the question for over 30 years, the speaker was there to declare his conviction that nationalism was perfectly consistent with the love of those whose rule we did not like. The disabilities with which he had been face

to face all these years in South Africa and India were really enough to make one hate his fellow-beings if he did not preserve his sanity. 'Correctly or incorrectly one feels he is subjected to the grossest tyrannies, for no reason but that he is not of the same colour as the rulers. How is he then to love those rulers?' was the question. Love being a positive force may be considered out of the question—how could he help hating the tyrant? Illustrations were taken from recent wars and administration of law in civilised societies to prove that hatred seemed to be of the essence of nationalism. Nevertheless it was the grossest of delusions. "So long as a large body of men and women retain that attitude, the progress of this country, the progress of the world is retarded. The world is weary of hate. We see the fatigue overcoming the Western nations. We see that this song of hate has not benefited humanity. Let it be the privilege of India to turn a new leaf and set

a lesson to the world. Is it necessary that three hundred millions of people should hate one hundred thousand Englishmen? That is the concrete form to which this evening's subject can be reduced. In my humble opinion it is derogatory to the dignity of mankind, it is derogatory to the dignity of India to entertain for one single moment hatred towards Englishmen." But it were well-nigh impossible for masses of humanity to eradicate hatred. Transfer then your hatred, said the speaker, from the evil-doer to the evil itself. Hate the evil, but not the evil-doer, was the maxim he would offer them. And in a few sentences burning with noble fervour he declared his creed: "Heaven knows, no one in India, perhaps, can claim better than myself to have spoken as fiercely and as fearlessly of the many misdeeds of English rulers and the corrupt nature of the system under which we are governed. My freedom from hatred,—I would even go so far as to claim for

myself individually, my love—of those who consider themselves to be my enemies does not make me blind to their faults. That is no love which is extended simply because of the possession of some virtues fancied or real in the beloved. If I am true to myself, if I am true to mankind, if I am true to humanity, I must understand all the faults that human flesh is heir to. I must understand the weaknesses of my opponents, their vices, and yet in spite of them, not hate but even love them.....I have not hesitated to call the system of government under which we are labouring “Satanic”, and I withdraw naught out of it. But I know that I shall not deal with it, if I begin to devise means of punishing the evil-doer. My business is to love them and by patient and gentle handling to convert them. Non-co-operation is not a hymn of hate. I know that many who call themselves Satyagrahis or Non-co-operators do not deserve to bear that name. They have done

violence to their own creed. Real non-co-operation is non-co-operation with evil and not with the evil doer." That was, however, not the place to go into the intricacy of that doctrine. It was a law that was applied in all well-organised families and he appealed to them to extend that law in the political field. A father or a son did neither seek to punish or encourage a son or father inclined to do evil, but tried to correct him. Of course there were fathers and sons who under a false sense of love doted on the erring sons or fathers. But he was talking of the 'love that discriminates, love that was intelligent, love which was not blind to a single fault—the love of the reformer.' The moment we realised the secret, that very moment evil would go out of sight.

And he instanced cases in which the reformer's love could play and had played an effective part. It could be applied as between members of the same

community, not to speak of different races. There were Hindus who considered untouchability as part and parcel of Hinduism, and quoted scriptures as authority. Were the more enlightened Hindus to hate or cut off the heads of those unenlightened ones? No. The secret was persistent non-violent conduct—or, better still, suffering in one's own person. Vaikam was an instance in point. It was the silent, patient, loving suffering undergone by the youngmen of Vaikam that had made untouchability in Travancore lose its foothold.

Summing up, Gandhiji said: "Suffering then is the secret. Hatred is not essential for nationalism. Race hatred will kill the real national spirit. Let us understand what nationalism is. We want freedom for our country, but not at the expense or exploitation of others, not so as to degrade other countries. For my own part I do not want the freedom of India if it means the extinction of England or

the disappearance of Englishmen. I want the freedom of my country so that other countries may learn something from my free country, so that the resources of my country might be utilised for the benefit of mankind. Just as the cult of patriotism teaches us today that the individual has to die for the family, the family has to die for the village, the village for the district, the district for the province, and the province for the country, even so a country has to be free in order that it may die, if necessary, for the benefit of the world. My love therefore of nationalism or my idea of nationalism is that my country may become free, that if need be the whole of the country may die, so that the human races may live. There is no room for race hatred there. Let that be our nationalism."

A question from Mr. Chapman, the Librarian of the Imperial Library, at the conclusion of the speech, drew a telling reply from Gandhiji. 'Was not the

insistence on political freedom and political equality on the part of Indians, conducive to race hatred, when Indians themselves were not capable of ruling themselves,' was in effect Mr. Chapman's question. "If you have drawn the deduction from what I said that we should tolerate your rule so long as we are not capable of managing our affairs, you are mistaken. We can develop that capacity only by resistance to the system. And may I say that the questioner unconsciously betrayed his own race-prejudice when he referred to Indians as incapable of ruling themselves. Underlying that prejudice is the idea of superiority and the conceit that the Englishmen are born to manage the affairs of the world. That is an idea to fight which my whole life has been dedicated. Unless the Englishmen are dislodged from that position there is no peace in India, nor any peace for the weaker races of the earth. It is the absolute right of India to misgover



herself. My heart rebels against any foreigner imposing on my country the peace which is here called *Pax Britannica*."

The President, an Oxford Father, in his concluding speech said that Mr. Gandhi, he had no doubt, seemed 'to combine more than any other Indian an ardent, fervent, almost militant patriotism, with an entire absence of race hatred.'

## CHAPTER IV

### IN CUTCH

The visit to Cutch was undertaken from a desire to see that country of the enterprising businessmen and the philanthropic merchant princes among whom Gandhiji claims numerous friends in Bombay, rather than with the view of tackling or even investigating into the numerous abuses attributed from the Press and platform to that isolated State. For long is the tale of woe of the Cutchies, and ever since the projected visit was announced in the papers Gandhiji's correspondence has been inundated with letters about Cutch. But of these later. Suffice it to say that we have been hearing the same tale ever since we landed in the deserted-looking port of Mandvi and drove through the

bleak dusty country to Bhuj, the capital town.

Cutch is co-terminus with Kathiawad and the conservatism of the people is here even more hide-bound than in Kathiawad. Gandhiji's first encounter was therefore with these conservative forces. The story of Mangrol narrated in a previous chapter was repeated on the very first day of arrival in Cutch, though here it was distinctly pleasing and of an encouraging and far-reaching character. The story is briefly told. There was a public address of course attended by all that the lavish hospitality of the Cutchies could conceive. They could have been discreetly silent about things where they knew they were on unsure and delicate ground. But that would be poor courtesy. So they eulogised Gandhiji's services in the cause of the untouchables, stated that their relations with them were quite all right and requested Gandhiji to give them the benefit of his advice as to what

more they could do in the direction But in flat contradiction of all these sentiments, the 'untouchables' were confined to a remote, safe corner of the meeting That was also the story at Mangrol. But later happenings there had forewarned Gandhiji and he therefore administered to the people in Cutch a warning more solemn and profound. 'I should not mince matters,' he said. 'I have been calling myself an untouchable and a sweeper not out of arrogance, or ignorance, or because I am Westernised, but because I may serve them all the better on that account. The Western influence had nothing to do with my views about untouchability. They are the deliberate convictions of a man born and bred up in a purely orthodox Hindu atmosphere and tradition, of a man who had practised Hindu religious teaching, by actually imitating his orthodox parents, of a man who had tried to study the human body as much as the Dweller of that taber-

nacle, of a man who had given years of study to the Shastras in perfect faith and devotion, of a man who had wandered throughout the length and breadth of India, discussing the matter with shastris and pandits, and who was more confirmed in his views as a result. You should have counted with them, when you invited me. But even if you feel to-day that you have made a mistake in inviting a man of such views, you can still retrace your steps, and courteously send me back. I assure you I shall appreciate it and not misunderstand it. You must know that whilst I would feel really honoured if you excluded me, I should feel deeply hurt if you excluded those friends. I can no more bear to be present in a place where they are slighted or insulted, than a devoted student of Ramayana can bear to stay in a place where the name of Rama is dragged in the mire. Pray, therefore, either permit them to come and sit with you, or me to go and sit amongst

them. The cordon that you have drawn goes right against the grain of my being. Either remove that cordon or put me with these my brothers. But mind you, I want you to do what you do with the courage of your conviction, and not to please me. If you exclude me I assure you I shall congratulate you on your courage and your instinct of self-preservation. But if you admit the 'untouchables', I adjure you to do so with the maturest deliberation, so that you might not later have to be in the sorry plight of those people at Mangrol who after I left them recanted their views and expiated for their sins. Let this be the first object lesson to you in Satyagraha.'

The warning went home and when the vote was taken, one could not but be struck with the deliberation which was manifest in the voting. There was a slight majority for the orthodox view, and with perfect pride and pleasure Gandhiji asked for permission to go and address

them now from amongst the 'untouchables'. There was not the least flutter as the table was quietly removed by the volunteers beyond the cordon, and in a few minutes the meeting was listening to Gandhiji addressing them from the new platform. It was a pure triumph of Satyagraha as the next day's meeting showed. For Gandhiji, after having congratulated them on the courage of their conviction, had laid down the law for all future meetings. 'No cordons. Reserve spaces, if you like, for the orthodox as you have reserved accommodation on railway trains for Europeans and Anglo Indians. I could bear to address a meeting from where the 'untouchables' were entirely excluded, but not one where they sat with the ban of insult and inferiority.' The evening happenings were unique in the history of the quiet peninsula and stirred the very foundations of society. The orthodox sections sat in solemn conclave holding

midnight deliberations and concerting measures for the next day. And the result? It was an agreeable surprise. A meagre attendance was expected, but instead of that thousands flocked, quietly taking their seats in blocks for and against 'untouchables' according to their convictions. There was hardly two feet of space dividing these blocks, and a stranger could hardly feel any difference but for the labels which were posted in front of blocks. There was perfect order, and the number of Brahmins and others who sat with the 'untouchables' was even greater than in the previous evening's meeting. I expect this to have far-reaching results not only in Cutch but outside the confines of Cutch. The people have themselves laid down the law which whilst it respects the susceptibilities of every one, will surely though imperceptibly break the opprobrious barrier.

So the people were weighed and not found wanting in one matter at any rate



There was, however, another in which the test was the same, but the result could be judged only later. That was the matter of their woes. The address had invited Gandhiji to advise the ruler and the ruled as to their mutual duties and obligations. There was a discreet and yet a sneaking reticence about the woes—so terrible is the fear of the Maharao! In Kathiawad some of the rulers had attended the popular meetings, the Diwans had done so almost everywhere. But there was hardly an officer of note present at the meeting! The inference was obvious, and Gandhiji's work in the second part of his reply to the address which he gave from the new platform was easy. 'If every ruler was a Ravana—a tyrant, my obvious duty would be to unfurl the banner of revolt against all government.' But there were Ramas as well as Ranas, and that fact had kept him from landing in the bog of anarchy. The Shastras were eloquent about the

essentials of a good sovereign, and their history was not devoid of instances of virtuous sovereigns. It is therefore that he inculcated upon them the necessity of regard and even reverence for a sovereign who was good, who abstained from drink and vice, who dreamt and thought of nothing but the welfare of his people, whom the honour of every woman in the land was as sacred and inviolate as that of his own wife, mother or sister. But to-day such rulers were few and far between. Their private and public life was as much full of vice as that of the ruled. It was a tale of mutual repercussion. He had heard of numerous abuses in the State whose hospitality he was enjoying, but he had not had the privilege of audience of the Ruler, and he could therefore say nothing as regards those particular grievances. But the remedy was clear and obvious. 'Have the courage of your conviction. It is as much your duty as your right to expres

your thoughts with freedom, truth and courtesy. If you fail in that obvious duty remember the truth of the English adage that a people got the government they deserved. 'As the ruler, so the ruled' is our political maxim, but the converse is no less true. Your primary duty—more so of people known for their enterprise—is therefore to gather up courage in both the hands and place your grievances before the Maharao. I can assure you that there is no abuse that can stand before the cleansing torrent of the *Triveni* of Truth, Determination and Love.'

The advice was listened to with patient attention, and the result of the wholesome shock that their supineness has received has yet to be seen. In the meanwhile Gandhiji has had the privilege of an interview with the Maharao. He told the next day's meeting that whilst he could not obviously tell them what passed between him and the

Maharao he must express his gratefulness that His Highness had heard him with patient attention on every one of the points that he placed before him, and he would tell them that he had kept nothing back, that he placed before the Ruler every complaint that had come to his ears. That was not the first time that he had exercised such privilege with a ruling chief. He had done so on every similar occasion before, and he would assure them that it was nothing but truth couched in the most courteous language that compelled attention, and they could do nothing better than copy his example in that respect.

There was a heart to heart chat with the Cutchees at that meeting about other matters of vital importance, of that anon.

Let me mention in passing that an appeal for funds for the Deshbandhu Memorial and for Cow-protection had a ready response. The Chairman of the

Reception Committee, Mr. Mansang Kachrabhai, susbscribed Rs. 10,000 for the Memorial and Rs. 2,500 for Cow-protection and a few hundreds more collected in the meeting. A notable contribution is of Rs. 500 by a Khoja gentleman for Cow-protection.

## II

Before I take up the thread of the story of our wanderings in these parts I must finish my account of the second day's meeting at Bhuj. Two noteworthy features of that day's speech must be recorded. One was the appeal for funds for Cow-protection and the other in which Gandhiji exploded the theory sedulously put forward from some quarters that money collected from Cutchees ought to be utilised in Cutch. As regards Cow-protection the position may be succinctly put thus; 'The cause has suffered a lot of harm at the hands of so-called *Gosevaks*. We forget that a hundred

times the number of cows killed for *Kurbani* by the Mussalmans are killed for purposes of trade. The slaughter houses in our country are maintained mainly for the army and for hides. The narrowness and ignorance of our millionaires and the torpid conscience of our religious teachers are responsible for the maintenance of most of these slaughter houses. The cows are almost all owned by Hindus and the butchers would find their trade gone if the Hindus refused to sell the cows. Every one of us who uses leather foot-wear is in part responsible for the slaughter, for the tanneries are said easily to treat hide of slaughtered animals than carcasses. If, therefore, we are serious about serving these animals, our millionaires will have to maintain tanneries and dairies, and we shall have to be tanning and dairy experts. The need for ample funds for the purpose cannot therefore be exaggerated.' I have already noted that Rs. 2,500 were subscribed a

Bhuj. At another place we got Rs. 1,250 more. We should have got more but for the propaganda of 'Cutchee money for the Cutchees' to which Gandhiji referred at length. 'A word to my impatient Cutchee friends. Why should I come all the way to Cutch, to collect money for use in Cutch? Do I not know that you are capable enough of looking after your own internal needs? And is it proper for you to invite me to Cutch to collect money for you? When the Cutchees gave me money in 1921, did they make a condition precedent that their contributions should be used only in Cutch? I should not have taken a single pie on that condition and even so today I want not a *cowrie* from you on that condition. For your own needs I know you can collect money yourself and you must do so. If you trust me with money you must do so in the fullest consciousness that I know how to use it and where to use it. Do the numerous Marwadi friends who give me

money whenever I make a call on them make any condition? They gave nearly a lac of rupees for Hindi propaganda in Madras, they are giving me money for untouchability and Cow-protection. Do they ever insist that their money should be used in Marwad? I am deeply pained to have to hear of such a thing from Cutchees known for their philanthropic spirit. I warn you this narrow provincialism does not become you. It bodes ill for you and for all.'

This warning has had to be administered everywhere and it is best that I set it out here for all who may be disposed to give anything to Gandhiji.

But I must revert to my story. Il news travels apace. And story o Gandhiji's doings at Bhuj spread like wild fire even in these parts of difficult communication and long distances. Our host at Kotda found himself in a bad hole having consented to put us up. It may be noted that he had contributed a hanc



some amount to the fund for the 'Untouchable Boys' 'school' to be opened at the place. But the opening of a school did not mean that the barrier of untouchability should be broken! A special teacher—preferably an 'untouchable'—could be had for the boys and everything could be managed from a distance. 'We might give them the necessary modicum of education. If they are hungry we might feed them. But where is the sense of asking us to touch them?' That is how our host had argued and he unblushingly told Gandhiji that all the money that was given for the school was given on condition that the school preserved the institution of untouchability intact. It was no use reasoning with him and when after much discussion a meeting was decided to be held in the evening, and was held, the kind friend was seen asking some of his trusted followers away from a meeting where the people had against his wish

perpetrated the sacrilege of reserving a block for the untouchables and those who dared to sit with them.

The experience was repeated at Khotara where we were face to face with a president who was possibly indifferent about the untouchables and who, dressed from top to toe in foreign cloth, treated us to a speech on the value of Khaddar and deplored the way in which the country had failed to take up Gandhiji's message. The fact is that Cutch is still in the preliminary stage, viz, the stage of public meetings and noise and bustle which, it would seem, must precede work. The lesson which has been repeated times without number in all parts of India had naturally to be repeated here with redoubled emphasis. 'You are mistaken in having invited me, if you are not inclined to practise a single one of my principles. The fact that I have been fighting the British Government should be no recommendation. My only cre-

dentials are my love for the untouchables, and my passion for Khaddar, without both of which my fighting capacity would be without its bottom. Accept my message of untouchability and Khadi, or reject me.'

### III

The Cutch tour was for all intents and purposes an anti-untouchability tour, and yet it was far from being anything like the tour in Travancore during the early part of the year. For in Travancore Gandhiji had fully reckoned with his host and the opposition were also absolutely honest with him. The orthodox there seemed to know that it was no use eliminating Gandhiji's views about untouchability from the aggergate of his views about social and political reform. They seemed to realise that they were the very essence of his reform, and therefore in spite of their regard for him personal-

ly, they nowhere took part in an reception or address. In Cutch it was different story, excepting only at one place. The "respectable" orthodox in every town wanted to show the world that they yielded to none in their respect for Gandhiji, and yet that they sacrificed not a jot of their 'respectability' which depended on among other things their anxiety to keep the barrier of untouchability intact. To add to the pathos of the situation those in charge of the tour programme would not move an inch without the approval of this class, with the result that at the first touch of truth the shows came toppling down like a house of cards.

The arrangement that Gandhiji suggested at Bhuj on the spur of the moment was successful, because there was no unreality about at any rate the principal people in charge of the reception, and because the arrangement was unpremeditated. At Mandvi the orthodoxy led b

a wealthy Sadhu decided to improve on what they thought was the mistake of Bhuj. There were to be two compartments as at Bhuj, but there were also to be two entrances, one for the untouchables, and another for the 'touchables'—orthodox as well as heterodox, so that the latter could be compelled to think twice before having once gone by the orthodox entrance they ventured out into the untouchables' enclosure. But Gandhiji's entry by the untouchables' entrance disturbed their calculations, and angered the Sadhu, who only a day ago had decided in the teeth of the Brahmin opposition to extend his hospitality to Gandhiji and his party and lend the use of his courtyard for the meeting. But I shall not repeat the story. One only wonders why an octogenarian Sadhu of apparently good intentions should have ordered his men to remove the untouchables by force and punished them for what was if at all Gandhiji's

fault. The next day's meeting was no less stagemanaged. Gandhiji and the reformers were of course permitted to enter by the untouchables' entrance, but care was taken to see that the orthodox enclosure remained absolutely inviolate. The President could not make up his mind to sit on the same dais with Gandhiji, and made himself ludicrous by an attempt to drop the casket containing the address into Gandhiji's hand, rather than hand it to him and pollute himself. He thought he was acting on Gandhiji's advice of the previous evening, for Gandhiji had said that the Sadhu instead of leaving the meeting could have dropped the address into his hands without incurring the pollution of the touch. Thus Gandhiji, otherwise touchable, became an untouchable that evening, because *before their very eyes* he had touched the untouchables.

Mundra went no better than Mandvi. Everything as at Bhuj, but planned

deliberately so as to frustrate the very purpose of the arrangement at Bhuj. There was the enclosure for the untouchables and the reformers, but every attempt was made to prevent a single touchable of the place from venturing into that enclosure! The President of the meeting, all the Hindu volunteers, even the Mussalman gentry of the town, and even the teacher of the untouchable boys' school sat in the touchable's enclosure. And yet they vied with one another in paying empty sonorous compliments to Gandhiji for his satyagraha and his Ahimsa! If Mandvi made itself ludicrous, Mundra was sickening and cut Gandhiji to the very marrow. In his speech that evening he mercilessly exposed the sham and cried out in bitterest agony: 'If this is Hinduism, oh Lord, my fervent prayer is that the soonest it is destroyed the best.' He warned the organisers of the tour against taking him to Anjar, the next and the last place on the programme,

and implored the people in the name of humanity and truth, to search and cleanse their hearts. But the organisers fought shy of abandoning Anjar. So to Anjar we went, to find another edition of Mundra.

Much did Gandhiji try to prevent it. He suggested to the orthodox President who was also our host to drop the meeting and the address, and to have instead a general meeting in the untouchables' quarters, and then if necessary a conference with the orthodox next day. 'But we have already made these arrangements. Is it not natural that we may not accept some of your views? We must do honour to you and you should not deprive us of the privilege of listening to your advice,' he argued. 'But,' said Gandhiji, 'what is the meaning of honouring me, when you do not accept the thing nearest my heart, when you insult those that I hold dearer to me than life itself? And there should be



some proportion, some decorum observed. I have addressed meetings of Europeans, who share none of my views. But they know their business better. They make no secret of the fact that I would not be spared at the meeting, and yet they know how to receive and honour their guest. At Calcutta they had a strictly vegetarian lunch entirely out of regard for me. But here? You seize a temporary arrangement suggested by me at Bhuj, and turn and twist it to your advantage, and do not hesitate to reduce it to an absurdity as at Mundra. How would it look if I tell my boy that he is at liberty to abuse me if he likes, and he makes it a point to abuse me to his heart's content every morning? That is what you have done. The President, I suggested at the first day's meeting at Mandvi, could have dropped the address into my hands from a distance, and the next day's President lost no time in benefitting by the suggestion!

‘No,’ persisted the President, ‘but, sir, you must go on repeating your views so that they may catch root some day.’

‘I am not going to emulate the preachers who go on delivering their sermons day in and day out before unwilling audiences. If you want to know and understand my views, you had better come to Sabarmati. At the little place Bhujpur, whence we are coming, the organsiers saw that no reception could be given me on my terms, and they accordingly dropped the reception and the address, and held the meeting in the untouchables’ quarter. It was honest and courageous of them. I beseech you not to indulge in these unreal demonstrations. I want you not even to entertain me and my party. I shall be content to be the guest of the untouchables and find my soul’s delight in their frugal but genuine hospitality,’ said Gandhiji arguing at length.

‘But’, urged the redoubtable President, ‘we have made all arrangements. The Reception Committee is very anxious to present the address. I appreciate what you say, but we did all this, not knowing you.’

‘How can you? I shall be known only after I am dead.’

If the orthodox meeting could be had first, and the untouchables’ thereafter, the President would probably have been satisfied. But what Gandhiji had suggested was humiliating! Gandhiji then asked him to call a meeting of the Reception Committee, place his proposal before them, and take their decision. ‘But, mind you,’ said he, ‘no middle course. Either accept my proposal *in toto* or go through the programme as you have arranged.’

The Committee met for about two hours and decided upon an elaborate plan of enclosures and the platform, the President to speak from a distance, eight

members of the Committee to sit amongst the untouchables, and the Seth of the town to hand the address to Gandhiji—and not to drop it as at Mandvi—, but of course to have a purificatory bath on going home! There was no room for argument now. ‘So you do not want to conform to my wishes. You want me to conform to yours,’ Gandhiji asked. ‘Yes, sir. That is the desire of the Committee,’ said the President. Gandhiji cheerfully accepted the defeat, went to the meeting and received the address.

But the speech? It was not a speech. It was the ‘Song of the Defeated’ that he sang. He thanked them for all the love and attention with which they had looked to his physical comforts. Cutch had yielded to none in that respect. But he had not gone there for his physical comforts. He wanted something else, which it would be painful for him to say and for them to hear. Religion all the

world over offered God as the solace and comfort for all in agony. Draupadi when she was in distress, and when her husbands had failed her, cried out to Lord Krishna and was comforted. Sita in Ashokawana had only Rama's name on her lips and was comforted. Shankerlal Banker, who was with him in jail, was torn with mental pain, and suffered from nerves, used the unfailing remedy of *Ramanama*. He got up every morning at 4 o'clock, took up the spinning wheel, and turned it with *Ramanama* on his lips. All his melancholy was gone and his life was filled with sunshine. In his own distress therefore he would think of Rama that evening and repeat His name. He had never done so before in a public meeting and advisedly. He could not do so before mixed audiences of Hindus, Mussalmans and Christians. But he could think of no other recourse that evening, and with apology to those who did not like the course, he wanted to take Rama's

name, turn his agonised heart in contemplation to Him, and be comforted.

'*Raghupati Raghava Raja Ram Patita Pavana Sita Ram*' was then repeated by him and many who joined him, for several minutes. This finished, the atmosphere was for some time filled with a solemn silence—silence 'which pent thought brings'—and slowly and silently the meeting broke up. 'No talk of the Charkha, not even of untouchability and no appeal for Deshabandhu Memorial!'—they were whispering to one another in wonderment. He had nothing to ask of them. He had placed his petition before his Lord, and levelled the battery of love at those who would not otherwise listen to him.

#### IV

I shall now give a few general impressions about men and things in Cutch. Let no one think that because I devoted all my previous chapters ex-

clusively to the storm raised by the untouchability question, the problem is in any way peculiar to Cutch or that Cutch is as bad or even half so bad in the matter as South India. No. In his relations with the common people the untouchable possibly fares better than even in Gujarat. He is usually a field-labourer, and naturally comes into close contact with the agriculturists who treat him as anything but an untouchable. Even the pollution of touch does not entail, except among the Brahmins, the purificatory rite of a bath. The sprinkling of a few drops of water is sufficient. The question was brought into prominence by the anxiety of the organisers of the tour to conform to the wishes of the wealthy classes and the anxiety of the latter to keep the barrier intact in their public behaviour. In private they may invite and have Gandhiji even in their homes, but in a public meeting he was to be kept at a safe distance ! They

have in this the support of the state also, for on the little line of Railway between Bhuj and Anjar the untouchables are not allowed to travel in the same compartments as the 'touchables.' They have 'reserved' accommodation in open goods' vans! which is hardly to be wondered at looking at the tenacity with which the immoral farming out of prostitution fine among untouchables is maintained.

The State has as its motto 'Courage and Confidence' which seem to be in evidence not so much in carrying out bold reforms, as in maintaining the *status quo* in most matters. What otherwise can be the reason of the maintenance of an iniquitous tariff which is levied not once or twice but as many times as the places a commodity is taken to, and of a system of exchange which has been converted into an iniquitous source of revenue? Both systems are ancient and must be maintained. But one does not know how ancient they are.



## IN CUTCH

But I have no desire at the ~~present~~<sup>present</sup> moment to draw up an indictment against the State. I am concerned more with the people and their virtues and vices. Gandhiji was told that there was famine in Cutch and so there is. Nature has entered into a perpetual conspiracy against the desert State. It has little vegetation and less water. But people generally respond to nature's vagaries. The people, therefore, have found in migration a remedy against famine and so during times of scarcity they either descend upon Bombay or move up to Sind in order to avoid starvation. We, therefore, saw no skeletons in Cutch. Both its people and cattle were stronger than in most parts of India.

But I must hasten on, for I cannot omit the possibilities of Khaddar and in this connection among several Khadi workers the name of a courageous and selfless lady by name Sadhviben who is working whole heartedly with money left by her

brother the late Mr. Velji Khatau, equally devoted to the cause. She lives in a village called Manzal surrounded by her fellow workers and is unremitting in her zeal for Khaddar and untouchables. She defies public opinion and continues her work with a cheerfulness which is infectious. Cutch has great possibilities for Khaddar. It has fine cotton. Its women know spinning. It has many weavers and the simple Cutch farmer has not yet discarded Khaddar. And if only the enterprising Bhatias, Banias, Lohanas and Memons will do their duty by them there is no danger of Khaddar being displaced. But unfortunately these traders have not only discarded their own beautiful Khaddar but they are corrupting the taste of the farmers and inducing them to buy their flimsy calico in the place of Khadda which they spin and weave in their own homes. It is to be hoped that the workers whom I have named and many others whom I have not named, will

redouble their efforts and reinstate Khaddar and prevent the impending foreign invasion in the shape of foreign cloth.

Parts of Cutch are hilly and parts are sandy, and communication is made extremely difficult by the practical absence of made roads. With the exception of two or three such roads, the rest are cartruts or scarcely perceptible tracks through stones and rocks, all the minor made roads being exclusively for the use of the State. The resourceful and humane Cutchee has therefore devised a conveyance, both for carriage and burden which is the lightest in India. The State and the wealthy Cutchee could do much for the improvement of these roads, but neither seems to have thought of it.

Nor has either thought more of education or sanitation. If Travancore comes easily first among all the Native States and the provinces of British India in this matter, Cutch comes easily last. It was

impossible to get correct statistics but the statement may be made without fear of contradiction. We were told that though a considerable percentage of the population is Mussalmans, there is only one Urdu school conducted by the State for Mussalman boys in the whole of Cutch.

A word here about the untouchables. The Cutchee untouchable is as resourceful as the other ryot, and earns his living by field labour, weaving or carpentry. There are still a large number of weavers, but they find very little custom for their Khaddar, and are fast giving up the occupation. There is very little drink amongst them, though they do eat carrion. The weaver, of course, regards the *Bhangi* as an untouchable as in Gujarat and Kathiawad, but curiously enough the barber also has been bracketed with the *Bhangi*.

There was unusual awakening amongst them as a result of the tour, and every

where we found them attending meetings and receptions in large numbers. In one or two places they outnumbered the touchables. In Mandvi and Mundra they were the first to greet Gandhiji, and in Anjar we had the largest meeting of the untouchables we have had for many a day. Before we went to Mandvi, we halted at a small village called Godhra. A number of untouchables had come and interviewed Gandhiji. There was a long talk about the use of carrion. Their spokesman had obviously a weakness for it and said that so long as they were responsible for the disposal of the dead animals, there need be no wonder if they used carrion. "But the surgeon also handles human corpses and he leaves them as soon as he has dissected the parts, and washes and cleans himself," said Gandhiji. 'Yes, sir, we know. But it is an agelong habit with us.' 'But if the habit is unhealthy and filthy?' 'How will all give it up, if a few amongst us do

so?’ Gandhiji inquired how often in the month they got carrion. The spokesman saw the point of the question and tried to evade it. But another friend replied: ‘We got it very rarely, sir. We have not had it now for over four months and when a corpse is brought in it is equally divided between the houses which means that a family gets only three to four pounds.’ ‘Where,’ asked Gandhiji, ‘is the difficulty of giving up a thing you get so rarely?’ ‘There is none,’ replied some and pointed to some who abstained from carrion. But the spokesman again intervened: ‘No, sir, we would be excommunicated by the community.’ He possibly did not know a change was coming over the whole community. For after the abrupt break up of the first day, the untouchables met and mooted the question, with the result that twenty five families sent up a resolution to Gandhiji, to abstain from drink, carrion, or meat in future. At Bhuj and

Anjar also there was a very large majority in favour of the reform. The movement is spreading and if the workers take the tide at the flood, it may soon lead on to a complete reform.

And the prospects are not gloomy. For there are many workers entirely devoted to the cause of anti-untouchability. The good Jivram Kalyanji is known to Gujarat and other parts only by his donation of a lakh of rupees for Khaddar after Gandhiji's imprisonment. But his zeal and his sacrifice for the improvement of the lot of the untouchable should make him better known. There is another friend Gokuldas Khimji who sets apart a considerable amount every year for the work, and himself toils and labours for it. There is also Mansingbhai, the Chairman of the Reception Committee, and the Nagar Seth of Bhuj who would sacrifice anything for the cause. Though Mansingbhai has his business in money he has decided to spend more time in

Cutch now. He has a soft corner not only for the untouchable, he gave a thousand koris (i.e. Rs. 600) to a Mussalman orphanage at Mandvi when Gandhiji visited it.

There are two veterans whose names I would mention amongst the workers, were they not also officers of the State. Both have grown grey in the service of the State, both are pledged to Khaddar, and both are Brahmins free from the 'canker of superiority'. Vithalji bhai is the Inspector of Education and after 42 years service in the Education Department has still energy left in him to think out plans and schemes of educational reform after his impending retirement. Jaykrishnabhai, the botanist, is a unique figure. His passion for reclaiming the salty and sandy coast-soil of Cutch, and of covering the land with trees is phenomenal. Trees are to him something more than living companions. He knows their habits and their behaviour, their



tragedies and comedies, as Faber knew those of insects and the other tiny inhabitants of the globe. All Europe knows Faber today, Cutch has yet to spread Jaykrishnabhai's fame beyond Cutch.

## CHAPTER V

### AT WARDHA

Every one knows the stay at Wardha has been for Gandhiji a blessing. He could not have been among more peaceful or restful surroundings, thanks to the anxious care with which Jamnalalji made all the arrangements. He has re-acquired all the weight that he lost during the fast,\* and is in fact more in weight today than he was soon after the taxing Cutch visit. But more than the physical rest, he has had mental peace here in this Ashram—as much his own as its parent the Sabar-mati Ashram—as he could have had nowhere else.

And for a reason. This Ashram, which Gandhiji calls ‘a glorified edition’ of the parent institution, is a temple of peace.

\* Mahatma Gandhi fasted for 7 days in November 1925, when he discovered some errors among boys and girls of the Ashram. For details, see *Young India*, 1923—1926. pp. 123-126 (S. Ganesan, Triplicane, Price Rs. 4.)

Vinoba is the moving spirit of the Ashram. He was imprisoned for supporting the Nagpur Satyagraha. When this branch at Wardha was opened at the instance of Jamnalalji, he was at the parent institution. But in course of time he was transferred here. It is not without considerable hesitation that I write about one with whom I enjoy the most intimate relations. I do so because the impression I give here is not only my own individual one, but is shared by all who know him. Under an uninviting exterior, he conceals a most winsome personality. If you could but conquer his reticence, you would find him to be one of those very few men to know whom is a privilege, and to be with whom is an education. Leading a life of the most austere simplicity, Vinoba is a *Brahmachari*, 'who, no stunted ascetic, is full of life and fire, but whose passions are trained to come to heel by a vigorous will, the servant of a tender conscience.' I know few men of his Sanskrit learning,

which he has treasured in his capacious memory, systematically arranged and labelled, ever at his beck and call. But I know fewer, if any, whose learning has become a part of themselves, whose learning appears not so much outside them as inside them. It is no wonder that he should have attracted to himself young men of his nerve and fibre. Leading a well-regulated life of hard, yet cheerful toil—beginning with prayers at 4. A. M. and ending with prayers at 7 P.M.—they teach, like Nature, a lesson of “toil unsevered from tranquillity.” Carding, spinning, weaving, and agriculture according to the time of the year, for six to seven hours a day, and learning from Vinoba whatever is worth learning in the couple of hours that he gives them, in their daily routine. Running their own kitchen, cooking their simplest possible food, wearing clothing made by themselves, themselves their masters and their servants, they have carried out the rule

of self-help and non-possession almost to perfection. It looks as though in such a life where there is not an idle moment to spare or an idle thing to be done, there could be no 'room for sin.' But even in the most ideal conditions a good man always lives in fear of God. And in order that no earthly temptation may disturb the even tenor of their lives, Vinoba gives them talks during the quiet moments after each morning and evening prayer.

I propose to share with the readers one of the many such talks—I will not call them sermons—that I have had the privilege to listen to.

The talk on the day I visited the Ashram was about the meaning of the Gita. For Vinoba too is pestered with inquiries of this nature by people from outside who occasionally visit the Ashram and attend the prayers. 'What is it that the Gita teaches—Ahimsa or Himsa?' And Vinoba's reply was straight and unmistakable. It was

mainly an elucidation of the fundamental position taken by Gandhiji. He prefaced the talk with an explanation that was characteristic of him. 'During the last twelve years I cannot recall a single day when I did not repeat or think of the Gita. For the study of it is one I have most cherished. The Vedas and the Upanishads are as much our treasures as the Gita, but whereas the former have a purifying quality for the initiated, the latter has the virtue of purifying mankind. I can say that I have devoted more effort to the study of the Gita than to the study or knowledge of any man or thing. I have, therefore, a certain claim to answer questions about the Gita. And though the particular question of today has been answered again and again, I would not tire of repeating my reply to it for the hundredth time. To me the reply is as clear as daylight that the Gita teaches nothing but Ahimsa.'

'Of course I agree,' he said, 'that

argument always follows conviction, and that the heart wrests from the intellect the answer that it wants. But apart from it, I can offer telling argument afforded by a scientific examination, in support of my meaning.'

Before proceeding to examine the text itself, he offered the simplest reason for his answer. 'The Upanishads teach nothing but Ahimsa. The Gita, which is the cream of the Upanishads, could teach nothing else.

'But let us go to the text,' he said. 'The reason why the question at all arises about the meaning of the Gita is the peculiar garb in which it is presented. The garb is of war and of battlefield. To a man who does not peer through the garb, the inside also appears nothing else but fighting and *Himsa*. But the Gita is like Rama whose exterior was hard as adamant but whose heart was tender as a flower. We have to break the hard husk and the crust of the co-

coanut to get at the soft sweet pulp within.

‘Let us then break the husk of the Gita. What is the question that troubles Arjuna? Is he troubled by the question whether *Himsa* is proper or *Ahimsa* whether war is right or wrong? Let us have it in Arjuna’s own language.

*Na cha sreyaṇuṇṇasyami hatva swajana mahavey.*

‘I see no good in the slaughter of kith and kin in battle.’ The spectacle of kith and kin grown enemies had overpowered him, *not* the prospect of battle. And kith and kin not insignificant by any means, but grandsires, sires and sons, uncles, brothers and fathers-in-law and sons-in-law,—nearest and dearest—to description of whom the learned sage Vyasa, an accomplished economist of words, has devoted so many verses! He has never before shrunk from battle, or killing his enemies in the field. But to kill *these*, some of them worthy of homage



was more than he could bear. And because he cannot face these particular people in the battle he begins to decry battle itself, and gives a lurid description of war and its horrors, destruction of household duties, and of the purity of women. He has fought many a battle before, but never have the horrors of war made him fight shy of them. Arjuna is verily in the same case as a judge who having all his life long given sentences of death to murderers, fights shy of condemning a murderer to similar punishment because he happens in this case to be his own son. And he calls to his aid high argument : 'Does not the Bible say : Judge not ? Does not Mahatma Gandhi also say that all punishment is futile ?' and so on and so forth. So often does a man overcome by infatuation press into aid convenient texts. Not that momentous occasions do not awaken momentous resolves. But there is no such awakening

“And look at Shri Krishna, He makes no answer to the argument about the horrors of war. War has its horrors, war is wrong indeed. But for Arjuna? he said to him: ‘You are mouthing the words of the wise.’ It is all too true, but it sounds strange in Arjuna’s mouth.”

Had Arjuna been filled with loathing for war as such, or killing as such, he would have made a proper reply to the other considerations advanced by Krishna.

*Akeertim chapi bhuthani kathayishanti te-ryayam.  
Sambhavithasya cha keerthir maranadathiri  
chyatey.*

‘And posterity will speak thy ill-fame from age to age, and for a man of noble birth ill-fame is worse than death.’ Arjuna could have said in reply that he cared not for fame, he simply did not want to dip his fingers in blood. Krishna also told him that he was betraying cowardice and feebleness of heart. Arjuna could have said: ‘No, I do not want t

fight, out of the strength of my heart.' But he does nothing of the kind. Fighting he wants, but the thought of kinsmen turned enemies oppresses him. If it was a question of choice between *Himsa* and *Ahimsa*, and if Arjuna had stood resolutely for *Himsa*, there would have been no need for Krishna to repeat to him the whole Gita. But his reluctance to fight was not *Saathvika*—born out of a spiritual awakening, but of *moha* (ignorance or infatuation) and was *Thamasa* (sprung out of darkness) *Moha-thasya parityagastha-masah parikeerthithah* or it may have been *Rajasa* (sprung out of passion) if he wanted to give up his duty because it was unpleasant—*Duhkmithyeva*.

The whole question, in short, is of Arjuna's ignorance or infatuation—*Moha* and the whole Gita is meant to dispel that *Moha*. In the very beginning, Arjuna sums up his own attitude in the words:

*Karpanyadoshopahathaswabhavah prichami  
thwaam dharmasammoodhachethah.*

‘Overcome by false pity, and ignorant of what to do I turn to thee.’ Having to dispel this ignorance by means of discourse that follows, Krishna asks the end of the last chapter.

*Kachchidagnanasammohah pranashita dhanamjaya.*

‘Has all the infatuation born of ignorance vanished, O Arjuna?’ Arjuna replies in words which the Hindu knows :

*Nashto mohah smrithirlabdha tvatpradan-mayaachyuta.*

‘The infatuation has vanished, and knowledge has returned to me, by grace.’

That is one thing. The next thing that according to the rules of logic, argument that is left unanswered is assumed to be accepted. And the argument about the evils of the war is now answered by Krishna. Even when it says it does not lie well in Arjuna

mouth, he accepts it as an independent proposition.

Now there are certain verses cited in support of the *Himsa* theory which do not do so at all. For instance, in the eighth chapter Shri Krishna says:

*Tasmatsarveshu kaleshu maamanusmara  
yudhya cha*

‘Then think of Me enthroned in thine heart and fight on always.’ What is the meaning of fighting on *always*? By no means fighting the Kurukshetra battle. Krishna presents before Arjuna a regular syllogism.

‘Those that think of me at the moment of their death come to Me.

Only those that think of me always can think of Me at the moment of their death.

Those that think of Me always, come to Me.’

Thus the fight which has to be carried on at all times, with Him in the heart, is not any particular fight, but the eternal fight with the forces of darkness.

Let us now come to the direct teaching of the Gita. Whether for the *gnani* or for the *bhakta* or for the *yogi*, *Ahimsa* is held up as an ideal. The description of the divine qualities is incomplete without *ahimsa* and many other qualities connected by it are named differently but are forms of *ahimsa* e.g. freedom from anger, peace, compassion, tenderness and reserve. The seventh chapter describes the perfect state of the mind, speech and body. Perfect state of the body is nothing without *ahimsa*, perfect state of speech is words that hurt no one and true—which is a part of *ahimsa* and the perfect state of mind is serenity of mind and benignity which also is nothing but *Ahimsa*. Take again the description of the devotee dearest to God in the twelfth chapter. His attributes are *ahimsa* first, *Ahimsa* next and *ahimsa* last: the first verse says he should be, who hates none and compassionate. Another one says, 'he troubles none and he is

troubled by none ' and in the last verse again he is alike to friend and foe. Even the Kshatriya's attributes are: *sowryam thejo dhrithir daakshyam yudhey chaapyapa-layanam* all expressive of valour—not flying away from battle, but baring one's breast to shot and shell, not skilfulness to kill, but the heart to be killed.

And lastly there are the commentators. There is none of them who reads *Himsa* in the Gita. Where the imperative *yudhayaswa, yudhaaya yujyaswa* (fight) is used, Shankaracharya says it is not by way of an injunction it is only by way of permission."

Here then is the substance of a talk which, if it suffers in the telling, does so as it is presented in a foreign tongue, and not in the sweet, rhythmic Marathi of Vinoba, and by one who does not claim intimacy with the Shastras that the author of the discourse can.





TOUR IN BIHAR, U. P., AND TRAVANCORE  
BY M. K. GANDHI



## CHAPTER I

### IN BIHAR

The tour in Bihar commenced with my attending the Bihar Provincial Conference at Purulia. The chief business of the conference was to pass a recommendatory resolution endorsing the proposed change in the spinning franchise. The Presidential speech was delivered in English, I wish Moulvi Zubair had delivered it in Hindustani. I know that half the audience did not understand this otherwise admirable speech. There was, too, the Hindu Sabha and the next day the Khilafat Conference in the same pandal. It was a most pleasing thing for me to find all the presidents respecting my wish not to speak at any of the conferences. I have grown weary of speaking. I have nothing new to say. I travel because I fancy that the masses want to

meet me. I certainly want to meet them. I deliver my simple message to them in a few words and they and I are satisfied. It penetrates the mass mind slowly but surely.

Annexed to the Conference was a well-arranged Industrial Exhibition. You saw there the undoubted evolution of Khaddar. There was the spinning competition and the distribution of prizes. Osman of the Khadi Pratishthan carried the first prize which consisted of a gold medal. A little girl six years old was also a prize-winner. Her spinning was not bad at all. She carried the prize in that she was only six years and yet could steadily spin for the competition. The lantern-slide lecture on Khaddar which Khitish Babu of the Khadi Pratishthan delivered to an appreciative audience was another feature.

The usual addresses and purse were there. The purse was intended for the All-India Deshabandhu Memorial Fund.

There were collections too on the spot both at men's and women's meetings. The collection at the latter was as usual larger.

I was taken too to a village called Golunda, a co-operative centre where spinning is being tried. It is an interesting experiment and if it is carried out scientifically it is bound to succeed and yield startling results.

Purulia has an old Leper Asylum managed entirely by the London Missionary Society. I saw the first Leper Asylum at Cuttack. But there it was a hurried visit. I was able only to see the lepers and the Superintendent. I had no time to see the appointments. At Purulia I was able to see the quarters and understand the working of the institution. In both the places the Superintendents and their wives have become devoted friends of the lepers. There was no unhappiness in the faces of the inmates. They were able to forget their distress through the loving

care of their Superintendents. I was told at Purulia that leprosy was brought under subjection by means of oil injections, especially in the initial stages. The Superintendent also told me that the cases that looked horrible burnt-up skin or burnt toes and fingers were not contagious at all. In such cases the disease had done its work. There was no contagion and no cure. The contagious cases were those which neither the public nor the patient recognised as such. These are the cases that admit of complete cure through injections. It is a matter of humiliation for us that the very necessary and humane work of looking after this portion of distressed humanity should be taken up solely by Christian foreigners. All honour to them, but what of us? The reader will be sorry to learn that leprosy is on the increase. The general reason assigned was unchaste living and wrong dieting.

Unlike other parts of Bihar, Purulia

and the surrounding country is a predominantly Bengali speaking tract. It has a comparatively better and cooler climate than Calcutta. The Bengalees use Purulia as a health resort. Deshabandhu's father built a beautiful home in Purulia. I was put up in this house. I felt sad having to be in Deshabandhu's house when he was no more. His father's and his mother's *samadhs* were in this house. They lie in a corner. A simple un-pretentious stone platform marks the spot where their ashes lie buried. Yonder was a dilapidated building which was built by one of Deshabandhu's sisters which she was conducting as a Widow's Home. With her premature death the Home died a natural death. Yet another dilapidated building was pointed out to me as a block of rooms which were built for housing poor people. The whole surroundings seemed to be in keeping with the mystic charity of this family of philanthropists. It was

therefore a privilege for me to be asked to unveil Deshabandhu's portraits and uncover two plates directing the stranger to a Deshabandhu Avenue and a Deshabandhu Road.

## I

I must now deal with my entry into the territories inhabited by the Ho's, the Mundas and the other aboriginal tribes among whom a silent reform movement is going on.

From Chakradharpur to Chaibasa is a pleasant motor ride over a very good road. It was at Chaibasa that I made the acquaintance of the 'Ho' tribe a most interesting body of men and women simple as children, with a faith that it is not easy to shake. Many of them have taken to the Charkha and Khaddar Congress workers began the work of reformation among them in 1921. Many have given up eating carrion and some have even taken to vegetarianism. The Mundas are another tribe whom I met at



Khunti on my way to Ranchi. The scope for work in their midst is inexhaustible. Christian missionaries have been doing valuable service for generations but in my humble opinion their work suffers because at the end of it they expect conversion of these simple people to Christianity. I had the pleasure of seeing some of their schools in these places. It was all pleasing but I could see the coming conflict between the missionaries and the Hindu workers. The latter have no difficulty in making their service commendable to the Ho's, the Mundas and the others. How very nice it would be if the missionaries rendered humanitarian service without the ulterior aim of conversion! But I must not reiterate the remarks I made before the Missionary Conference and other Christian bodies in Calcutta. I know that such a revolutionary change in Christian endeavour as I am advocating cannot come through any advice, especially from an outsider, however

well-meant it may be; it can only come either out of a definite individual conviction or out of some great mass movement among Christians themselves. Among these tribes there is quite a colony of them called *Bhaktas*, literally meaning devotees. They are believers in Khaddar. Men as well as women ply the Charkha regularly. They wear Khaddar woven by themselves. Many of them had walked miles with their Charkhas on their shoulders. I saw nearly four hundred of them all playing their Charkhas most assiduously at the meeting I had the privilege of addressing. They have their own Bhajans which they sing in chorus.

Almost the whole of my travelling in Chhota Nagpur was in motorcars, but the roads are all good and the scenery around magnificent. From Chaibasa we had to retrace our steps to Chakradharpur and from there we motored to Ranchi, halting at Khunti and one or two

other places. Just before reaching Ranchi at 7 o'clock in the evening a meeting of ladies had been arranged. I do not think that either the organisers or the ladies bargained for my appeal for the Deshabandhu Memorial Fund. But as I hardly ever fail to make that appeal when I address public meetings, I made it at this meeting also. The vast majority were Bengalis. Many being unprepared had no money with them. These therefore parted with their ornaments some of which were heavy things. It did one's soul good to see these sisters gladly parting with their ornaments in order to honour the memory of one they loved. Needless to say, I make it perfectly clear at these meetings that the whole of the gifts would be utilised for spreading the Charkha and Khaddar.

In Ranchi, I was taken to Galkunda, a little village where an experiment in hand-spinning is being made under the ægis of a Co-operative Society by Babu

Girishchandra Majumdar, who is a Khaddar enthusiast. He expects spinning to become a thorough success. The experiment has just begun. If organising is properly done and the spinning wheels fulfil the standard requirements, there should be no difficulty about the Charkha becoming the success it has been elsewhere.

There were two theatrical performances given at Ranchi by Amateur Companies for the purpose of Deshabandhu Memorial Fund. One was given by Bengalis and the other by Biharis. As they were given by amateurs I had no difficulty in accepting their invitations but I was severely disappointed over the Bengali performance. I could see little difference between the performances of professionals and this Amateur Company. There was complete aping of professionals. The dresses were all made of foreign material. The colouring of faces was also resorted to whereas I had expected

that these performances would be subdued and that there would be at least Khaddar used for dress material. So when I undertook to go to the Bihari Amateurs' play I made the condition that if they wanted me to see their play they should have their dresses made of Khaddar and that not merely for the occasion but for all their performances. To my agreeable surprise, the condition was readily accepted. There were only a few hours left for making all that change, but they did it and the Manager made the announcement of the promise given to me and prayed for God's help that they might be able to fulfil the promise. What the Biharis' play lost in tinsel effect it gained, in my opinion, in dignity by the change adopted. I commend this very desirable change to all amateur theatrical companies. Indeed, even the professionals who have any patriotic instinct can easily make this change and thus contribute, though ever so little, to the

economic uplift of the teeming millions of India.

I must omit several interesting items including a very pleasing discussion on Khaddar with Messrs N. K. Roy and S. K. Rao of the Department of Industries and a visit to the Brahmacharya Ashram which owes its existence to the munificence of the Maharajah of Kasimbazar. From Ranchi we motored to Hazaribag where in addition to the usual appointments I was called upon to address the students of St. Columbus' Missionary College, a very old institution. I spoke to the students on social service and endeavoured to show that it was impossible without character and that such service on a large scale in India was only possible through penetration into the villages and that it had to be its own reward for it brought no excitement, no advertisement and had often to be done under most trying circumstances and in the teeth of superstition and ignorance.

I endeavoured to show that the best form that social service could take in India was through the spinning wheel and Khaddar, because it brought young men in touch with the villagers, it enabled them to put a few coppers every day into the pockets of the villagers and created an indissoluble bond between the latter and themselves, and it helped them to know their maker because the self-less service of the poor was the service of God.

## II

From Hazaribag with a few stoppages on the motor road to Gaya we went to Patna where the main work was the activity of the All India Congress Committee and the inauguration of the All-India Spinners' Association. It was at Patna that I discovered my health would break down under the incessant fatigue of travelling. The shouts of the crowd had almost proved unbearable as we were nearing Gaya where I was obliged even to

stuff my ears to prevent the shouts making me almost to swoon. Rajendra Babu had therefore taken elaborate precautions to prevent noisy demonstrations of blind but wellmeant affection and he very kindly revised and cut down my programme. I had therefore comparative rest at Patna. I was able to fulfil the long cherished desire of visiting the Khuda Bux Oriental Library. I had heard much about it. But I had never realised that it had the rich treasures I was privileged to see. Its devoted founder Khan Bahadur Khuda Bux who was a Vakil made it a labour of love to collect even from abroad many ancient and rare Arabic and Persian books. The decorations in some of the hand-written copies of Koran that I saw were of great beauty. The unknown artists must have given years of patient labour to the creation. Every page of the decorated edition of the Shahanamah is a work of art—a veritable feast for the eye. I understand that the literary value



of some of the manuscripts treasured in this library are no less great. All honour to the founder for his great gift to the nation.

The other interesting thing I was able to see in Patna was the workshop conducted by the Department of Industries. Mr. Rao is the Superintendent. The workshop itself is a modern building, well-lighted, well-ventilated, well-planned and scrupulously clean. Handloom weaving and toy-making which is the speciality of Patna are the features of this workshop. Improved looms for weaving tapes and bedstead-straps are commendable. I could, however, not help feeling that in this admirable workshop, the central thing the spinning wheel was wanting. Improved toy-making will certainly give better wages to the makers of toys and it has therefore properly a place in a workshop in a city like Patna. An Indian workshop is also incomplete without hand-loom weaving. But no national

department of industries can be considered to be at all complete that takes no note of hand-spinning and therethrough of millions of villagers who are at present without a supplementary industry. The difficulties that were suggested to me in making hand-spinning a success were mainly two:

(1) Hand-spun yarn can never compete with mill-spun yarn because it has never yet been found to be as strong as mill-spun yarn.

(2) The out-put of the spinning wheels is too small to be profitable.

The experience of those who have worn Khaddar for years is that where it is made of good hand-spun yarn it is any day more durable than the best mill-spun cloth of the same count. For instance some of my Andhra friends have shown me their dhoties which have lasted four years and upwards against mill-spun dhoties which wear out inside of a year. But my point is not that hand-spun is

more durable, but that hand-spinning being the only possible supplementary industry for the peasantry of India, which means 85 per cent of its population, all our arrangements regarding clothing should be fashioned on the understanding that it must be supplied from hand-spun yarn. Thus our energy should be concentrated not on finding out the best and the cheapest yarn, no matter where and how spun, but on finding out the cheapest and the best hand-spun yarn. If any proposition is sound all the industrial departments of the nation should revolve round the Charkha as the centre. The Department of Industries, therefore, would make improvements in the spinning wheels so as to increase the output. They would buy nothing but hand-spun yarn, so that hand spinning is automatically stimulated. They would devise means of utilising every quality of hand-spun yarn obtainable. They would issue prizes for the finest hand-spun yarn.

They would explore all possible fields for getting good hand-spun yarn. This does not mean less encouragement to hand-weaving. It simply means adding to the encouragement of hand-weaving and hand-spinning and thereby serving those most in need of help.

But it has been objected that hand spinning is not profitable. But surely it is profitable for those who have many an idle hour at their disposal and to whose scanty income even a pice is a welcome addition. The whole of the Charkha programme falls to pieces if millions of peasants are not living in enforced idleness for at least four months in the year. Wherever Khaddar workers are doing their labour of love it has become not only profitable but a blessing to villagers to have men who would buy their yarn. Those whose income does not exceed five to six rupees per month and have time at their disposal would gladly take in work that brings

them an addition of two rupees per month.

I have before me a report of work done by a band of volunteers in several parts of Bihar. I visited their centre at Malkhachak after my visit to the industrial workshop. The place is about twelve miles from Patna. In Malkhachak alone with a population of about a thousand there are four hundred wheels going and there are thirty weavers weaving handspun yarn. I saw some of the sisters plying their wheels. They were indifferently constructed. Yet the spinners seemed to be happy with them. They get two rupees per month on an average. An addition of eight hundred rupees per month in a village containing one thousand souls is surely a big income any day. I do not count the wages earned by the weavers at the rate of fifteen rupees per month. That may not be a new addition. These workers in addition to organising spinning are

also giving the village folk such medical relief as is possible with their limited resources and still more limited medical knowledge. The report of their work which was started in 1921 mentions that they are serving six centres viz. Madhubani, Kapasia, Shakri, Madhepur and Pupri besides Malkhachak. They wove in 1922, Rs. 62,000 worth of Khaddar, in 1923, 84,000 in 1924, 63,000. And they have already woven one lakh worth during the nine months of 1925. They wove less in 1924 because of want of cotton. Their capacity for extension, the report says, is almost unlimited, given a regular supply of cotton and a market insured for the disposal of their wares. They believe that almost every village in the neighbourhood would welcome the presence of these workers. The quality of Khaddar produced by them is excellent and is by no means all of the coarsest variety. Some of it is even exceedingly fine. They pay four annas per seer of

40 tolas for spinning ten counts and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  annas per yard of 45 inches width for weaving. They have 28 workers. The upkeep of these depots including food and travelling amounts to Rs. 25 per month per worker on an average. These depots are not at a loss. They organise their own sales. The quality of yarn they receive shows a steady improvement from month to month. I invite the Department of Industries and the public in general to study the condition of these villages and verify the facts given above for themselves. These workers are responsible for 7,000 wheels and 250 looms weaving hand-spun yarn in the villages.

The condition of Bihar is in no way extraordinary. It is more or less the same in many parts of Bengal, Andhra, Tamil Nadu and the United Provinces. I have mentioned these provinces because the condition of those who have taken up spinning can be studied there. At the present moment, most of the other

provinces would show the same state of things. Orissa for instance where the people are living from hand to mouth only awaits skilled workers and efficient organisation. Rajputana, inspite of its millionaires is again a tract where the art of spinning is still alive and where the people are extremely poor. If only the Rajahs and the Maharajahs will lend their hearty support to the movement, encourage Khaddar wear in their States and remove the handicap on Khadi wherever it exists this land of chronic droughts will without any great outlet of capital and without any fuss, have lakh of rupee per year for its poor people.

### III

From Patna we went to Bhagalpur. At Bhagalpur there was a very great public meeting at which I was obliged to make a somewhat lengthy reference to the Hindu-Muslim question. Though my influence over those who are agitating the



question is gone, they continue to discuss with me the various problems arising from it. I felt, therefore, that I should redeclare my views for what they might be worth. Apart from merits I must confess, that I have not liked this constant reference to the Government by both the parties on matters, which they by mutual settlement or appeal to the sword can adjust. I, therefore, told the audience, that since neither party was prepared to compromise and each was afraid of the other, the best way would be without seeking the intervention of the Government to settle the matters in dispute by the method of the *Lathi*. Retreat out of fear was cowardice and cowardice would not hasten a settlement or the advent of non-violence. Cowardice was a species of violence which it was the most difficult to overcome. One could hope to persuade a violently inclined person to shed his violence and take up the superior force of non-violence, but

since cowardice was a negation of all force, it was impossible to teach a mouse non-violence in respect of cat. He would simply not understand what non-violence could be, because he had not the capacity for violence against the cat. Would it not be a mockery to ask a blind man not to look at ugly things? Maulana Shaukat Ali and I were at Bettia in 1921. The people of a village near Bettia told me that they had run away whilst the police were looting their houses and molesting their womenfolk. When they said that they had run away because I had told them to be non-violent, I hung my head in shame. I assured them that such was not the meaning of my non-violence. I expected them to intercept the mightiest power that might be in the act of harming those who were under their protection, and draw without retaliation all harm upon their own heads even to the point of death, but never to run away from the storm centre. It was manly

enough to defend one's property, honour or religion at the point of sword. It was manlier and nobler to defend them without seeking to injure the wrong-doer. But it was unmanly, unnatural and dishonourable to forsake the post of duty and in order to save one's skin to leave property, honour or religion to the mercy of the wrong-doer. I could see my way of successfully delivering the message of *Ahimsa* to those who knew how to die, not to those who were afraid of death. I told the audience further, that those like me who deliberately did not want to fight and were powerless to effect a settlement might follow the example of those Mussalmans, who during the time of the first four Caliphs sought the refuge of the cave when brothers began to fight one against the other. The mountain cave in these days was a practical impossibility but they could retire to the cave which each of us carried within himself. But such could be only those who

had mutual regard for one another's religion and customs.

Then there was a Provincial Marwadi Sammelan where I spoke on the question of social boycott and on the crying need of social reform. I told the Marwadi friends, that communication was a lawful weapon in the hands only of those who deserved to be classed as *Mahajan*, which meant pure men who were real representatives of their respective groups or castes and who declared excommunication not from personal spite but from the selfless motive of conserving the interest of fellow-beings. It was an immoral abuse of power to put under the ban of excommunication a person who for the sake of learning or legitimate gain crossed the waters or who for the sake of obtaining a suitable match for his son or daughter went outside his sub-caste or who dared to remarry his widowed daughter of tender age. If *Varnashram* which had a useful and

proper place in the Hindu social system was to be rescued from destruction, it was high time that the innumerable sub-divisions were fused into one. There was, for instance, no reason why a Marwadi Brahmin or Vaishya should not seek marriage relations with a Bengalee Brahmin or Vaishya. The *Mahajan* to be truly great will have to encourage rather than suppress tendencies towards fusion.

If excommunication was ever deserved nowadays, it was deserved by those who gave away their daughters in marriage before they were full-grown, at least before they were sixteen, and if secret immorality was to be discountenanced, it was the duty of parents of child widows to encourage their remarriage.

#### IV

From Bhagalpur we motored to Banka where there was a district conference presided over by Maulana Shaffi Sahib. There was nothing noteworthy here ex-

cept for the huge and embarrassing crowds through which I passed with difficulty with my bruised toe. We went thence to Devgarh otherwise known as Vaidya-Dhamnath. This is not only a famous place of pilgrimage but also a health resort beautifully situated and surrounded by hills. This is a favourite place with the Bengalees. Unlike as in other places of pilgrimage I found here the *Pandas* i.e. the priests in charge of the shrines to be a fairly cultured body of men. The majority of volunteers were smart *Panda* youths who rendered great assistance, was told, to the pilgrims. There are several educated men amongst them, one being even a High Court pleader. I had the pleasure too of a visit from the elderly *Pandas*. They wanted me to tell them what they should do to serve the people and when I told them that they should serve the pilgrims instead of seeking to profiteer at their expense, and endeavour to make the places of pilgri

mage really holy places by themselves leading pure and restrained lives, they readily agreed and there seemed to me to be a ring of sincerity about their assent to my proposals and a humble recognition of the existence of the evils I had ventured to point out. I was agreeably surprised to discover that the great temple was open to the so-called untouchables. The usual women's meeting was arranged in the spacious temple compound just opposite the shrine. The order kept by the *Panda* volunteers wherever I went in Devgarh was certainly much better than I have observed elsewhere.

The public meeting was so well-organized as to ensure perfect quiet. The public address made pointed reference to terrible sufferings that the people of this district underwent in 1921-22. It should be noted here that this is the district called Santhal Parganas. It is a Non-regulation part of Bihar. The Commissioner's will is therefore the law of the land. The

address also referred to the fact that whereas during 1921 and 1922 the drink habit had all but disappeared, it was again making headway amongst the Santhals. The possibilities of Khaddar were stated to be very great. In my reply I pointed out that no nation had ever come to its own without much suffering. I, therefore, did not mind the sufferings that the people underwent in 1921-22. Only suffering to be beneficial must be voluntary and must be enjoyed. When it came, such suffering left the sufferer stronger and happier at the end of it. I was, therefore, grieved to discover that the suffering in the district had caused demoralization amongst the people. It meant that all the suffering was not voluntary. It was up to the workers to set an example in pure and voluntary suffering. There should be persistent agitation amongst Santhals against the drink habit and the Charkha work should be systematically organised.



There was, too, a separate presentation of an address by the Municipality. I take note of this event especially for the exceedingly tasteful but simple arrangements made for the presentation in the open air. The attendance was evidently regulated by tickets and was confined to so few that the audience could have been easily accommodated in any commodious building. But the Commissioners chose to erect a little pandal decorated with foliage tastefully arranged in the midst of beautiful natural scenery. I could not therefore help recalling in my reply to the address of the Municipality the dirty state of the road leading to the temple and the dilapidation surrounding it. I have visited almost all the places of pilgrimage in India, and everywhere the condition in and about the temples is deplorable.—disorder, dirt, din and stench. All these are probably less marked in Devgarh than elsewhere. But all the same the contrast between the

temple surroundings and the place where the address was presented was painful. If the Municipality, the Pandas and the pilgrims combine together, they could make the temple and its precincts beautiful, sweet-smelling and uplifting as they ought to be. If honest and proper management could be assured, I had no doubt, I told them, that the rich pilgrims would gladly pay for the comfort that they would get at such holy places.

# V

From Devgarh we proceeded to Khargdeha which is reached through Giridih from where it is a motor ride of 26 miles. At this place the programme began with a meeting of ladies. Hitherto I have restrained from myself criticising the heavily ornamental decoration of some of my fair audiences, oppressive though it has often appeared to me. But the bangled arms from wrist practically to elbow, the huge thick nose-rings with

about a three inch diameter which could with difficulty be suspended from two holes proved beyond endurance, and I gently remarked that this heavy ornamentation added nothing to the beauty of person, caused much discomfort, must often lead to disease and was, I could plainly see, a repository of dirt. I had never seen so much ornamentation anywhere else. Heavier articles I have seen as for instance the unbearable heavy anklehoops,—I cannot call them rings—of Kathiawad ladies, but never so much body space covered over with so many bangles and what-nots. I was told that these huge nose-rings often resulted in cutting the delicate nasal membranes. I was nervous about the effect my very straight remarks would produce upon my gentle audience. I was therefore considerably relieved when at the end of my speech and in response to my appeal for Deshabandhu memorial Fund they crowded round me and gave liberally from

their purses. I took care to drive my piont home to every donor individually and asked her to give up a large part of her superfluous ornaments. The ladies received my remarks with a gracious smile and some of them even gave me a part of these ornaments. I do not know whether the quality and the quantity of adornment has anything to do with the development of character. That it has something to do with the intellect can be proved from innumerable instances. That it has connection with culture as distinguished from character is also obvious. But as I put character before even culture, I wonder whether I would be always right in making use, for advocating reform in the art of decoration, of the privilege I enjoy of addressing thousands of women in all the different parts of India. Be that as it may, I would urge upon the parents and husbands of these simple folk, on grounds of economy and health, the necessity of inducing

among them a considerable reduction in these articles of personal furniture.

It was at this place that I made the acquaintance of Mahuris otherwise known as Mathuris, a body of Vaishyas who, generations ago, are supposed to have migrated from Mathura and the surrounding country and settled in Bihar. They are fairly well-to-do and enterprising. Their chief occupation is commerce. Some of them are staunch reformers. They have taken to Khaddar and appreciate its advantages for the poor people. Many of them have given up meat and drink which they used to take before. In their address they stated that they understood the movement of non-co-operation as purely of self-purification, and that it had revolutionized their inner life. They take little or no part in politics but they are intent upon making all kinds of reforms in their own little community. This moral effect of non-co-operation upon so many people

all over India is perhaps its most *enduring* result. It is fraught with consequences of which we can have as yet but little notion. Similar reforms were reported to me as having taken place also amongst the Santhals, many of whom have become from having been habitual drunkards complete teetotallers. That movement among them received a check when picketing was withdrawn, but it is again reviving without the element of violence which had crept into the movement in 1921. It will be the saving of the simple but ignorant races like the Santhals if they can be weaned from the drink habit.

At Giridih the address presented to me contained interesting references and there was, also, as in Chaibasa, an address from the Goshala Committee. The Local Board address referred to the bad condition of the roads under its charge. The justification given was shortage of funds. I had no hesitation in replying that shortage of funds was no excuse for

keeping the roads in bad repair when Congressmen manned Local Boards. After all roads were national property, Congressmen were national servants and when by entering Local Boards they obtained charge of roads they were expected to keep them in good repair whether there were funds or not. They might put up on every good point a valiant fight with the Government but their constructive work should in no way be allowed to be neglected. If they found that they could not properly discharge their trust they must resign. Want of funds was no cause for resignation because that could be made up for by voluntary effort. Let the members of such boards take up the pick-axe and the shovel, gird up their lions and themselves work at the roads and call a party of volunteers to assist them. They will earn the blessings of the public as also of the dumb cattle and command the respect of the superior authority. Indeed in all

municipal work everywhere a large part of it is done by the councillors unofficially and with the voluntary support of the public. The late Mr. Joseph Chamberlain turned Birmingham into a clean city studded with statues and other decorations, not merely through the paid service of the Corporation but by the voluntary support, pecuniary and other, of its citizens. The Municipality of Glasgow dealt with its plague epidemic in a summary and exemplary fashion only because the members of the corporation received the willing and unstinted support of its citizens. The Municipality of Johannesburg, within my own experience dealt with similar trouble in the same summary manner. It counted no cost too great for the eradication of plague,-- burnt down its market buildings and its location and had behind it the resources of its determined citizens. I told my audience that therefore I was asking for nothing heroic of the Local Board



members by asking them to do the road repair themselves with the assistance of Congress volunteers if they had not enough funds. If we captured Municipalities and Local Boards we must be able to give a good account of ourselves in all the constructive work that was entrusted to our charge under statutory authority.

The Committee of the Giridih Goshala said in its address that it had an annual income of nine thousand rupees in donations and an income of only two thousand rupees from milk etc. The reader will recall that it is the same tale as that of Chaibasa. Much cry but little wool. An ideal Goshala would supply the city of its domicile with cheap and wholesome milk from cattle of its own keeping and cheap and lasting foot-wear not out of slaughtered hide but out of the hide of dead cattle. Such a Goshala will not be on one or two acres of ground in the heart of a city or in its immediate

neighbourhood but it would have at some distance, but within easy reach fifty to a hundred acres of ground where a modern dairy and a modern tannery would be conducted on strictly business but national lines. Thus there would be no profits and no dividends to be paid and there would be also no loss incurred. In the long run such institutions dotted all over India would be a triumph of Hinduism and would be proof of Hindu earnestness about cow, that is, cattle protection and it would provide decent employment for thousands of men including educated men; for both dairy and tannery work require expert scientific knowledge. Not Denmark but India should be a model State for the finest dairy experiments and India should not to her shame have to export nine crore rupees worth of dead cattle hide annually and for her own consumption use slaughtered cattle hide. If such a state of things is a shame for

India it is a greater shame for Hindus. I wish that all the Goshala Committees will take to heart the remarks I made in reply to the Giridih address and make their Goshalas into ideal dairies and tanneries and a refuge for all worn out and maimed cattle.

A third interesting reference in the Giridih address was to non-spinning by its labourers. Giridih has several mica mines. It has therefore many labourers working in those mines. These labourers get naturally a higher wage than they can possibly get from spinning and they are therefore not spinning at all. As a matter of fact there need have been no such apologetic reference as was made in the address. The readers of *Young India* know that I have never suggested that those who are more lucratively employed should give up their lucrative employment and prefer handspinning. I have said repeatedly that those only are expected and should be induced to spin

who have no other paying employment and that too only during the hours of unemployment. The whole theory of handspinning is based upon the assumption that there are millions of men and women in this land who are idle for at least four months in the year for want of some employment. There are only therefore two classes of people who are expected to spin, those who would spin for hire, whom I have already mentioned and the thinking part of India who should spin for sacrifice by way of example and in order to cheaper Khaddar. But whilst I could understand labourers not spinning, I could not understand their not wearing Khaddar. There was no excuse for a single person in that vast audience not to wear Khaddar. Giridih can produce and manufacture its own yarn and weave its own Khaddar without any difficulty, and in any case can get all its supply of Khaddar readymade and comparatively cheap.

from the other parts of Bihar. But I notice that whilst these addresses admit shortcomings about Khaddar and the Charkha, they are mentioned, I fear, not as an earnest of reform in the immediate future but by way of consolation for continuing the same state of things. A confession is good only when it is intended to be followed up by a retracing ; it is worse than useless when it is used to harden oneself against a change. I hope that the confessions made in the many addresses presented to me will be precursors of a definite change.

From Giridih we came to Madhupur. There I was called upon to perform the opening ceremony of its now elegant-looking little Town Hall. In performing the opening ceremony and in congratulating the Municipality on possessing its own abode I expressed the hope that the Municipality would make Madhupur a beauty-spot worthy of the climate and natural surroundings it possessed. The

difficulties in the way of improving big cities like Calcutta and Bombay were very great. But in little places like Madhupur, if Municipalities had a very small income they had also no difficulty to face in keeping their areas spotlessly clean and free from diseases. I visited too the national school which Madhupur boasts. The head-master in the address which he read drew a gloomy picture of the prospects before him, decreasing attendance and decreasing pecuniary support from the people. He mentioned also that some parents withdrew their boys because hand-spinning was compulsory. The address asked me to point the way out of the difficulties mentioned. I replied that if the teachers believed in their mission they need not be disappointed. Ups and downs in all new institutions were their natural lot. Their difficulties therefore were the teachers' testing time. Those convictions only could be described as stable which would stand the stress of

storms. The teachers should, therefore, count no sacrifice too great if they believed that they had a message to deliver to their surroundings through their schools. They would then remain unconcerned whether there was only one boy or there were one hundred in the school, provided it was perfectly clear to them that they had done their best for the school and that it was not their shortcomings that estranged the parents and the boys but that the very principle for which they stood was repugnant to them. If they had faith in hand-spinning they would not mind the parents withdrawing their children from the school. If they had retained spinning only because it was a fashion, or because the Congress resolution required it, and not because they had faith in it, they need not hesitate then to do away with spinning and retain the goodwill of the people. Time has arrived when national teachers have to make a definite choice for themselves,

because, when new changes are made here are always some people who resent one or all of them. It is only the teacher with faith in himself and his cause who could resist opposition to the change which he considers to be necessary and which alone perhaps justify the existence of his new enterprise.

From Madhupur we proceeded to the Purnea District, which meant a new surrounding and a new country. For Purnea District is on the northern bank of the Ganges, and it lies to the north-east. All that district is really the Himalayan *terai*. The climate and the people are almost like those of Champaran. We crossed from Sakrigali Ghat to Maniari Ghat, a voyage of about two hours duration. We reached Maniari early in the morning. The people of that place presented a purse for the Deshbandhu Memorial. We went from Maniari by train to Katihar junction where there were the usual public meetings. The no



day we went to Kishangunj where also there were the usual meetings and a purse. Kishangunj contains a large Marwadi population. They had made a good collection. A deputation came to me complaining that although they were ready and willing to wear Khaddar they could not get any in Kishangunj. They said that the whole of the cloth trade was in the hands of the Marwadi merchants who sold only foreign cloth, because, the deputation said, the Marwadi merchants told them it paid them best. I told the deputation, however, that whilst I would gladly speak to the Marwadi friends, their excuse was really inadmissible, because if there was a large demand for Khaddar in Kishangunj they could open a co-operative store themselves. It was no use blaming the Marwadi merchants who were after all in Kishangunj for their business. It was for those like the deputation who believed in Khaddar to set the fashion, go to some trouble in

stocking it, and then induce Marwadi friends to take it up also. This, however, I saw, they were not prepared to do. I told them too that if they guaranteed a minimum sale I would undertake to persuade Rajendra Babu to open a Khaddar depot in Kishangunj. This they were not prepared to risk. I spoke to the leading Marwadi merchants who told me that as a matter of fact for some time some Marwadis did have some Khaddar in their stores, but there was no great demand for it. And they admitted that there was no special effort made by the Marwadi merchants to push Khaddar before the public.

From Kishangunj we went to Araria, and from Araria to Forbesgunj, the north-eastern extreme point of Bihar near which commences the Nepal border, and from where I was told on a clear day one could see the magnificent snowy range of the Himalayas. Before we reached Forbesgunj I was inclined to congratulat

Rajendra Babu and his band of workers upon the excellent control they had obtained upon the people in that, unlike as on previous occasions, the vast crowds of people were orderly, noiseless and exercised exemplary self-restraint by refraining from besieging me to touch my feet. I was, however, disillusioned at Forbesgunj: because the order broke down there. The crowd was immense. The meeting had to take place under the fierce sun. The people had been waiting since morning without any shade overhead. The noise and the din were terrible. It was impossible for me to get any quiet; and volunteers were unable to restrain the vast crowd from coming to touch me. The fact is that not much work had been done there before. The volunteers were new to the task. The poor fellows tried their best. Nobody was to blame. It was a new situation and a new experience for them. And the people were not to be deprived of what they must have con-

sidered to be the only opportunity of coming near me and touching me. It is an affectionate superstition; but it is also most embarrassing for me. I spoke to them about Khaddar, about the spinning wheel, about temperance, gambling and the like; but I am afraid that it was all like foreign speech to them. Mysterious are the ways of God. Tens of thousands of people irresistably drawn to some one or to some thing of whom or which they had but the vaguest idea. I do not know whether they profited by coming to see me, a perfectly strange being to them. I do not know whether it was worthwhile my going to Forbesgunj. Perhaps it is as well that we do not know the results of all we do, if only we do things for the service of God and humanity and do nothing which we know to be wrong.

From Forbesgunj we proceeded to Vishanpur which is about 25 miles from Purnea. It is a rough motor ride because there is no proper metalled road. There

was a tremendous gathering in this village and I was surprised to see so much public spirit in a place so remote from the railway line. The people presented a good purse for the Memorial. A novel feature of this meeting was that a permanent platform was built for the meeting. It was nearly fifteen feet high. It is brick-built. Under-neath is a Khaddar Store. The whole conception combines beauty with use. The most pleasing function in this village was a nicely built library and reading room which I had the privilege of opening. There is a large open enclosure surrounding the library building provided with marble benches and the library itself is a memorial to the deceased wife of Chaudhry Lalchand. That in a place like Vishanpur such an upto-date memorial should have been thought of shows a great advance in political education of the right sort. From Vishanpur we came back to Purnea which is the headquarters

of the District where practically the Bihar tour was concluded with the usual functions. The tour really concluded at Hajipur to which I was attracted four years ago by the youthful zeal of a band of workers through whose energy a national school was established. Purnea District has supplied over seventeen thousand rupees, a part of which is earmarked for the Bihar (National) Vidyapith. The rest about fifteen thousand is for the Deshabandhu Memorial Fund. Throughout the Bihar tour including this sum the total collection for the Memorial amounted to about 50,000 rupees.

## CHAPTER II

### IN UNITED PROVINCES

At Hajipur my Bihar tour ended. It was all orderliness and noiselessness at Hajipur. Though I was lodged in the national school huts in front of which the huge public meeting took place, the volunteers were disciplined and the crowds were previously informed through notices and otherwise that I was ill-able to bear the strain of noise, rush and the touching of feet. In spite of, therefore, there being hundreds of men crowding round the school premises I had perfect quiet. Of all the national schools in Bihar this is perhaps the best managed and the best manned, Janakdhari Babu, a non-cooperating Vakil with a character of great beauty, being the principal. There was a purse, too, of nearly Rs. 5,000 at Hajipur. With this pleasant ending

and the ceremony at Sonapur of opening a Sevashram chiefly for the purpose of attending to the comfort and requirements of thousands of visitors who annually flock to Sonapur in connection with a unique fair that takes place there every full moon day of the first month of the Hindu year and which draws the finest horses, elephants and cattle to the Sonapur fair, the Bihar tour ended and entered U. P., Ballia being the first place.

The travel to Ballia although requiring only four hours was most trying. The meeting there was a terrible ordeal and contrast to all I had seen and experienced in Bihar. It was a slow train that carried me to Ballia from Chapra. There were stations every few minutes. Vast crowds gathered at every station and made most noisy demonstration which the volunteers were unable to control. I knew that it was all blind and excessive affection. I was to have gone to Ballia in 19



I was unable to do so then. The people, therefore, were almost incredulous, but when I actually did go there, they became delirious with joy. The volunteers could keep no control. As soon, however, as I could get them to listen to me, and understand my appeal for the Desha-bandhu Memorial Fund, they paid freely. At Ballia itself the crowd at the station was most unmanageable. Rev. Mr. Perill, of the American Mission had kindly brought his car to the platform which I could reach with the greatest difficulty but which alone made it possible to pass unhurt through the pressing crowd. From the station, we went directly to the public meeting. There was a huge and lofty platform which, I saw at a glance, had been erected by an amateur and was wholly unsafe for the number of persons which the floor space could accommodate and for which it was intended. There were nearly seven addresses. All the members connected

with these should naturally have been on the platform. The stairs leading to the platform were shaky, slippery and unsafe. The platform swung to and fro when anybody walked on it. It could hardly bear the weight of ten people and it was dangerous even for one person at a time to walk on some parts of it. The chairman at once recognised that if a tragedy were to be avoided, all but myself should remove themselves from the platform. So they gently hurried down, leaving Rajendra Babu in charge of me. Those who were to read the addresses came on at a time and in spite of these precautions it was not at all certain that the whole structure might not come down at any moment. This was by no means my first experience of a dangerous weak platform. I recall at least two accidents. This was the weakest I have seen. The very appearance was enough for an ordinary trained eye to detect the weakness, but those in charge had

experience and evidently the man who was entrusted with the erection had none. Let this Ballia instance be a warning to Congress workers all over, that they should not attempt ambitious platforms, or when they do they should leave the erection to trained men who know what they are doing.

The meeting too was almost uncontrollable by the volunteers. The noise continued whilst the addresses were being read, but in spite of it all they observed perfect silence when I appealed to them to give me a hearing. I deduced from this fact the conclusion that a little previous preparation as in Bihar would have produced the same results and I would have done much more substantial work at Ballia than I was able to do. What is wanted is quiet and sustained work. Ballia possesses some very good workers, and it is possible to make it a greater centre of activity. I know that the people of Ballia are patient and long

suffering. Theirs was no mean sacrifice in 1921-22.

## I

From Ballia we went to Benares where we had to change for Lucknow on our way to Sitapur. There was a halt of five hours in Benares. Babu Bhagwan Das took the opportunity of arranging a meeting of students of the Kashi Vidyapith. He took me also to see the good work in spinning and weaving done by the middle schools conducted by the Municipality. Their work, it will be remembered, was started by Prof. Ramdass Gour, and it has been since continued. Both *Takli* and the spinning wheel are in work in the school. The experiment may fairly be claimed to be a success. At the Vidyapith I was shown the workshop. A growing feature is its carpentry department. The spinning wheel cannot be claimed to have prospered in the Vidyapith. I had occasion in my speech to say to the students and the professors

that if they had no faith in the spinning wheel they should remove it from their curriculum entirely. It was no use giving it a place because it was the fashion to consider it part of national activity. Time had arrived when every national institution worth the name had to evolve its educational policy and to prosecute it even in spite of opposition and indifference.

From Benares we went to Lucknow, where there was a halt of over three hours. There the Lucknow Municipality did me the honour of presenting me with an address which was written in choice high-flown Urdu. Special care was taken to make the language as difficult as possible for a simple man like me, not belonging to U. P., to understand. Most difficult Persian and Arabic words were used and it seemed as if every word of Sanskrit origin or word spoken by the Crown was deliberately excluded. Naturally, therefore, I was supplied with an

English translation. I, therefore, told the Municipality that it was not possible for me to congratulate it on its high-flown Urdu. I believe in a national language for inter-provincial commerce but that language could neither be Lucknavy Urdu nor Sanskritised Hindi. It must be Hindustani, a combination of words generally spoken by the Urdu-knowing and the Hindi knowing public, a language easily understood by Hindus and Mussalmans alike. The Municipality of Lucknow is essentially a Swarajist Municipality. It has a record of work in no way inferior to that of its predecessors. But I told my audience that it would be improper to be satisfied with merely coming to the standard of its predecessors. Congressmen wherever they capture an institution should be able to show a better record and it was, therefore, a matter for thought that the Lucknow roads were so bad as they were. If want of funds was the cause, the excuse was inadmissible and

Congressmen were expected to take up the spade and the shovel and repair the roads by their voluntary labour. I congratulated the Municipality on its experiments in dairying, but I warned them against being satisfied until they could supply cheap and pure milk to the population within their jurisdiction.

The address of the Municipality was discreetly silent about the Hindu-Muslim question. Speaking, however, amongst friends (most of the councillors whether Hindus or Mussalmans were friends whom I knew) I could not ignore the question and therefore spoke upon the growing tension between the two parties. I suggested that whatever happened in other parts of India Lucknow at least should be able to compose the differences and to achieve a unity unbreakable under any strain and irrespective of what happened in other parts of India.

I had time to pay a flying visit to its Women's College. This is a college

conducted by the American Mission said to be the oldest institution of its kind in all Asia. I saw there girls drawn from almost every part of India. They flocked round me to get my autograph in their autograph books. I have scared away many autograph-mongers by mentioning the condition under which I generally give my autograph, and that is that the applicants should promise to wear Khaddar and spin regularly. I mentioned the conditions to the girls. Nothing daunted they readily made the promise which the lady superintendent has assured me she would see was religiously kept.

## II

From Lucknow we motored to Sitapur reaching there about 10 p.m. Before reaching my quarters I had to attend a meeting of the Hindu Sabha to receive its address. In reply to the address I said that I hardly deserved it because I had done nothing for the Sabha as such ; or



the contrary I had even criticised, though in a perfectly friendly spirit, some of its activities; but I accepted the address as I yielded to no one in my devotion to Hinduism. I said further that all religious activity was of true service only in so far as it adhered to truth and non-violence in their fulness. From the Hindu Sabha meeting, I was taken to a public meeting where there was to be an address of the Municipality. The next day, I visited in company with the Ali Brothers, the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan Conference. The Presidential address admirable in many respects had scrupulously avoided the use of words of Persian or Arabic origin. In my speech, therefore, I was obliged to reiterate the views I expressed in the reply to the Lucknow Municipality address. Highly artificials and Sankritised Hindi is as avoidable as highly Persianised Urdu. Both the speeches are unintelligible to the masses. I have accepted Hindustani as a common

medium because it is understood by over 20 crores of the people of India. This is not the artificial Lucknavi Urdu or the Sammelani Hindi. And one would expect at least a Sammelan address to be such as would be understood by both Hindus and Mussalmans of the common type. The animal who if he pronounces the name *Ishwar* dreads to pronounce the name *Khuda* or the one who would pronounce the name *Khuda* at every turn but would regard it as sinful to utter the name *Ishwar* is not an attractive being. I reminded the audience too that Hindi propaganda in U. P. could only consist in improving the literature and creating an atmosphere for the advent of a Hindi Rabindranath and that the Sammelan should devote its attention outside U. P. to popularising Hindustani speech and by publishing standard works of other languages in Devanagri character. Maulana Mahomed Ali emphasised my first point by remarking that if Hindustani

speech required an artificial stimulus in the home of its birth the attempt to make it the common medium had better be given up. In the afternoon there was the conference presided over by Maulana Shaukat Ali. His address which was a thesis on Hindu-Muslim Unity wound up with an exhortation on Charkha and Khaddar. I was called upon to follow him and therefore took up the theme the Maulana had just introduced. I showed the necessity of the Charkha and Khaddar and ended with my reasons for helping the Patna decision which I contended was not a forced growth but an exact indication of Congress public opinion. Pandit Motilalji who followed me took up the Patna resolution and explained it in detail and whilst reiterating his own belief in the Charkha and Khaddar said that the Congress could not be thoroughly representative of the people unless it became predominantly political. After passing Panditji's resolution con-

firming the Patna decision and approving the formation of the Spinner's Association, the delegates went to the Gujarati pandal to partake of light refreshments that were provided by the Gujarati merchants who were domiciled in Sitapur.

My tour in U. P. if it may be so-called was wound up with a long and hearty discussion with a Hindu Sabha deputation that had come from Lucknow specially to confer with me on the Hindu-Muslim tension in Lucknow. I told them that I had not gone back on my undertaking to arbitrate upon their disputes. I told them that I had offered to hear the evidence last year in Delhi but I told them that now under the changed conditions neither party might care to submit the matters in dispute to me. But that if they did I would gladly make time even to go to Lucknow and arbitrate. On the deputation telling me that the Hindus would like me to arbitrate I advised them to approach the

Mussalmans and let me know if the responsible men of both the parties were prepared to abide by my award.

Thus ended my tour in Bihar and U. P

## CHAPTER III

### IN TRAVANCORE

It was a perfect pleasure to visit Travancore and incidentally Cochin. It is a land of perfect beauty. My few days in Travancore were days of incessant journeying and meeting vast crowds of people. Travancore is blessed with a magnificent waterway and equally magnificent roads. Its extreme length is 179 miles and breadth 75 miles. Its area is 7625 square miles more than half of which is covered by hills and forests. I entered at the northern entrance. Vaik-am lies almost on the northern border. The route lay through a beautiful waterway studded on either side with luxuriant vegetation, chiefly palms. I was taken to the extreme south, the Cape Comorin, where the sea daily washes in adoration the feet of Hind Mata. And as I travelled,

I seemed to go from one end of a beautifully laid out garden to the other. Travancore is not a country containing a few towns and many villages. It looks like one vast city containing a population of over 4,00,000 males and females almost equally divided, and distributed in small farms studded with pleasant looking cottages. There was, therefore, here none of the ugliness of so many Indian villages in which human beings and cattle live together in an over-crowded state in spite of the open air and open space surrounding them. How the Malabaris are able to live thus in isolated cottages and to feel, as they evidently do, safe from the robber and the beast I do not know. Those of whom I inquired about the cause could not say anything beyond corroborating my inference that both men and women must be brave.

The women in India lives nowhere in greater freedom than in Malabar. She is more than well protected by the local

law and custom. Education among women is nowhere greater than in Travancore. Indeed, Travancore appears educationally to be the most advanced part of India. In 1922 general literacy was 241 per thousand of the population 330 in the case of males and 150 in the case of females. This literacy is daily increasing both among males and females. The backward classes are taking their full share in this wonderful progress. This progress even disturbs a sceptic like me. If all the education means general discontent with one's surroundings, a wrench with the past without hope for the future and a general scramble for employment, the whole of the beautiful edifice must one fine morning come down with a sudden crash. Without the culture of the heart and the hand mere growth of literacy has no attraction for me. What is wanted, therefore, is a drastic measure giving not an indifferent manual training but a proper occupa-



tional training specially designed to make it worthwhile for highly educated men not to look up to Government service but to farming or say weaving for their maintenance. Unless the mind of the student world is given a bent in the direction of the main and natural sources of livelihood and is developed in a scientific spirit in keeping with the special Indian conditions, the gulf between the educated classes and the masses must widen ; the former must live on the latter instead of the former living with and for the latter and sweetening their life.

But I do not wish to write this note in a critical spirit. For the photograph I have on my mind of Travancore is altogether pleasing. My visit to Her Highness was an agreeable surprise for me. Instead of my being ushered into the presence of an over-decorated woman, sporting costly diamond pendants and necklaces, I found myself in the presence of a modest young woman who relied not

upon jewels or gaudy dress for beauty but on her own naturally well formed features and exactness of manners. Her room was as plainly furnished as she was plainly dressed. Her severe simplicity became the object of my envy. She seemed to me an object lesson for many a prince and many a millionaire whose loud ornamentation, ugly looking diamonds, rings and studs and still more loud and almost vulgar furniture offend the taste and present a terrible and sad contrast between them and the masses from whom they derive their wealth. I had the honour too of waiting on the young Maharaja and the junior Maharani. I found the same simplicity pervading the palace. His Highness was dressed in a spotlessly white *Dhoti* worn in the form of a *lungi*, and vest reaching just below the waist. I do not think he had even a finger ring for an ornament. The junior Maharani was as simply dressed as the senior Maharani the Regent. It was with

difficulty that I could see on her person a thin delicate *Mangala Mala*. Both the ladies had on their persons spotlessly white cotton handwoven *Saris* and half-sleeved jackets of similar stuff without any lace or embroidery.

The reader must pardon this minute description of the Travancore royalty. It has a lesson for us all. The royal simplicity was so natural because it was in keeping with the whole of the surroundings. I must own that I have fallen in love with the women of Malabar. Barring Assam, I have not seen the women of India so simply yet elegantly dressed as the women of Malabar. But let the Assamese sisters know that the women of Malabar are, if possible, simpler still. They do not require even borders to their *Saris*. The length needed is under four yards, a sharp contrast to the Tamil sisters on the east coast who need nearly ten yards heavily coloured *Saris*. The Malabari women reminded me of

Seeta as she must have been dressed when she hallowed with her beautiful bare feet the fields and forests of India along the route she traversed. To me their white dress has meant the emblem of purity within. I was told that inspite of the utmost freedom they enjoyed, the women of Malabar were exceptionally chaste. The eyes of the most educated and advanced girls I met betokened the same modesty and gentleness with which God has perhaps endowed the women of India in an exceptional degree. Neither their freedom nor their education seemed to have robbed them of this inimitable grace of theirs. The men of Malabar in general are also just as simple in their taste as the women. But, sad to say, their so called high education has affected them for the worse and many have added to the simple articles of their original dress and in so doing have purchased discomfort in the bargain. For, in the melting climate of this country the few

hite garments are the proper thing. ~~making~~ making unnatural unbecoming additions they violate the laws of both art and health.

## II

After all this generally flattering description of the men and women of Malabar the reader would expect to find here the widest use of Khaddar. I am sorry, however, to say that such is not the case. Though there is no warrant for the use of mill-made cloth in Malabar, Khaddar has made but little progress. If Khaddar was well organised the people would take to it without the slightest difficulty. For they have not the excuse for not using it that the people in other parts of India have. They want no colours. They do not need large lengths. They wear no turbans or other head-dress. They are therefore well able to take to Khaddar without the need of a revolution in their tastes. Not one Malabari spoke to me about the difficulty of persuading the people to

adopt Khaddar. Some did speak to me about its prohibitive cost. But locally made Khaddar need not be dear. For the wages here are low. But no one has thought of organising the wheel and Khaddar. Happily the art has not altogether died out. Near the Cape there is still held a fair at which hand-spun yarn is sold. There are thousands of weavers who are weaving mill spun yarn.

The Provincial Congress Committee has done something but it is sadly little. The Vaikam Satyagrahis have been doing much more. But ever so much more requires to be done.

The Legislative Council has recently passed a resolution requiring the Government to introduce the spinning wheel in the State Vernacular Schools. The Dewan in his address to Sri Mulam Popular Assembly said that effect would be given to the resolution during the next school year, the necessary provision for the purpose having been made in the

current year's budget and the services of a competent spinning instructor having been advertised for. A great deal can be done to popularise hand-spinning if the local Government act in a businesslike manner. The State has a hand-weaving department. It has a textile expert. The reference in the address to hand-weaving is worth reproducing. Here it is :

“The Textile Expert was directed to devote his attention first to the improvement of hand-loom weaving, which is the most important cottage industry in the country. For the introduction and demonstration of improved methods in weaving and dyeing, a central technical institute on a large scale is necessary. The required buildings are in process of construction within the premises of the School of Arts, which have been enlarged by the acquisition of adjoining lands. Pending their completion, a beginning has been made in a rented building, where

the Textile Expert has taken six students each for training in weaving, dyeing and knitting, and is demonstrating improved methods of knitting and hand-loom weaving and the possibility of utility of utilising indigenous dyes for dyeing. The institution is open to the public and it is hoped that the people interested in these matters will freely visit it. Two itinerant weaving parties have been entertained to work among cottage weavers in the southern and the northern taluks of the State respectively. It is through these parties that the results obtained by the experiments of the Textile Expert are spread among the numerous cottage weavers scattered over the whole State. It is reported about 200 dhobies were newly introduced by these parties into the country during 1099 M. E. Two depots have been opened for the sale, at cheap rates, of loom accessories to cottage weavers, one at Trivandrum and the other at Nagarcoil



and the itinerant parties also carry for sale these accessories to the cottage weavers' doors."

The same thing that is being done regarding weaving will have to be done regarding hand-spinning if it is to be successful. The department can improve the wheels and inspect those that may be in use. It can give loans of wheels to the poor people and sell them on hire purchase system. It can encourage voluntary spinning by undertaking weaving at a cheap rate. It can encourage the weavers to take to using hand-spun yarn. What can be more graceful or more appropriate than the royalty taking to spinning and thus popularising it among the submerged classes? The population is roughly as follows:

Brahmins.....	60,000
Caste Hindus.....	7,85,000
Untouchables.....	17,00,000
Christians.....	11,72,934
Mussalmans.....	2,70,478

Animists.....12,637

Other religions.....349

Of these the majority of the seventeen lakhs of untouchables and the eleven lakhs of Christians are very poor. To them spinning as a home industry during leisure hours must be a veritable blessing. Those who have farms do not and cannot work in them the whole day.

The State concentration on the development of this great national industry and the State patronage of Khaddar will at a stroke increase the savings or, which is the same thing, the income of the people by at least Rs. 12,000,000 counting only Rs. 3 per head of population, for the labour to be spent upon the cotton before it is turned into cloth required for the use of its 40 lakhs of people. An extremely well regulated State like Travancore can solve the problem of famines, floods and poverty in an incredibly short time by handling the question of hand-spinning in a scientific manner.

It was a sad sight to see the Christians from the Bishop downward using foreign cloth. They are the most educated and progressive community in the State. They owe it to the country to use their high education and intelligence for its service. The best service they can render is to adopt spinning and Khaddar and lead the way for the other communities. I single out the Christians because they are better organised than the Hindus and the Mussalmans. They are the most influential and the most numerous here compared to the Christians in other parts of India. They can, therefore, easily take the lead in Travancore though they cannot be expected to do so elsewhere.

### III

The one thing most deplorable next to untouchability is the drink curse. The total excise revenue of the State was in 1922 Rs. 46,94,300 against Land Revenue Rs. 38,18,652 and out of a total revenue

of Rs. 1,96,70,130. This I regard as a most serious blot upon the administration. That so much of its revenue should be derived from intoxicants affords food for serious reflection. The excise revenue sub-divides itself thus :

Abkari	....	... ..	Rs. 26,82,367
Opium and Ganja	....	Rs.	3,11,635
Tobacco	....	....	Rs. 17,00,298

-----  
Total Rs. 46,94,300

Thus liquor revenue is a terrific item. I was told that the drink was most prevalent among the Christians and that it was decimating hundreds of homes and bringing poverty and disgrace upon thousands of men otherwise able and intelligent. From all one can see the State is looking upon the increasing revenue with philosophic calmness, if not pleasure. The communities are playing with the evil and playing at temperance. It is necessary to stamp out the evil before it is too late. The most effective

method no doubt is to make the getting of liquor impossible except upon a medical prescription. How to give up the largest source of revenue is the question. If I was the autocrat able to impose my will upon Travancore I would remove that source of revenue altogether and close every liquor shop, take a census of those who are addicted to the habit and find out means of giving them healthy refreshments and healthy amusement or employment as the case may be and rely upon the people turned sober contributing to the revenue more by their increased efficiency than by drinking. But the days of autocracy are over. Democracy is the autocrat. The Legislative Council and the Popular Assembly can do the whole thing. It would be wrong to fling one stone at the Maharani Regent and another at the Dewan and say that the duty was done. The people are having a daily increasing share in the administration of the State. They

are extremely well educated. They can force the State to use the whole of the revenue while it is being received, towards the eradication of the evil and insist upon closing the nefarious traffic in a year's time. But whether it can be done in a year or it must take longer is for the people to decide. Let them know that there is a snake in the grass. And I respectfully ask once more, who can lead in this matter if not the Christians? My importunity to the Christians does not absolve either the Hindus or the Mussalmans. But in such matters the first appeal must be to the stronger party.

#### IV

I have reserved the question that troubled me to Travancore to the last. I have positively dreaded to write about it. I have remained in the exile during the best years of my life and after reaching the age of responsibility. Having returned

ed, I have been absorbed in a series of undertakings which have excluded all other pursuits. I must, therefore, confess my ignorance of many things Indian that I should have known. Although I knew vaguely that Travancore was called a progressive State, I did not know anything of the marvellous progress it had made in some directions nor did I know of the ravishing beauty of its landscape. But when I saw with my own eyes what the State is, what a cultured ruler and what a cultured Dewan it had, this existence of unapproachability staggered and puzzled me. How the inhuman thing could exist in such a State with such a Sovereign, such a Dewan and such a people, baffled me as it still baffles me. But for the Satyagraha no one would have known anything of it. But now that it is known in its nakedness, I must own that I have become impatient for its removal. I am impatient because I am a Hindu, because the State is a Hindu State,

because its Dewan is a Hindu, because the people are educated and because the evil is acknowledged. If it was the British Government, it could certainly plead neutrality if it wished. But since it is a Hindu Government and in this case and in such cases it is not dominated or influenced not so far as I am aware—by the British Government, it cannot plead or profess neutrality. It must take the side of reform and oppose blind orthodoxy or superstition even as it would take the side of the robbed and come down upon robbers with a heavy hand. A Hind sovereign is the custodian of the dignity and protection of Hinduism against assault from without and disintegration and corruption from within. It can remove abuses that have crept into Hinduism without any difficulty or even in spite of it. Whilst, therefore, I have been able to appreciate the extreme caution observed by Her Highness at



the Dewan Bahadur as representing the Government of Travancore, I have not been able to understand or appreciate the nervous anxiety about the consequences of removing the abuse. But I believe both to be anxious for the removal of the abuse. Though the local men have told me that but for the support, secret and open, given by Government officials to the opponents of reform there would not be even the little opposition that there is to the proposed reform. I have not been able to share this view. I am inclined to think that it is largely based upon suspicion. I therefore take at their face value the Dewan's references. I am of opinion that he sincerely believes that there is a legal difficulty and that public opinion is not ripe for the reform by legislation. He, therefore, wants to bring it about by consent. The reformers claim that public opinion of Savarna Hindus has been expressed with sufficient emphasis in that the vast majority of

the Savarna Hindus voted for the council resolution favouring the reform and that the caste Hindu Jatha that travelled from Vaikam to Trivandrum last year proved the same thing. They further point out that of nearly eight lakhs of caste Hindus over seven lakhs are Nairs and that the Nairs are almost to a man in favour of the reform at least in so far as the use by the unapproachables of public or semi-public roads is concerned. They argue further that the temples are public property of which the Government are trustees. All this argument deserves consideration. But I still feel that it is open to the Government to dispute the inference that the opinion of the Savarnas is over-whelmingly in favour of reform.

I had the privilege of meeting the opponents of reform who kindly permitted me to wait upon them. They claim that the movement is confined only to a few youngsters, mostly outsiders, tha

the caste Hindus are over-whelmingly opposed to the claim of the unapproachables which they, the orthodox opponents, refuse to call reform. They contend that the prohibition to use the roads surrounding temples such as the one at Vaikam has been handed down from immemorial times and is based on direct writings of Shankaracharya. The spokesman said that if the unapproachables were permitted to pass through the roads in question, the orthodox would not be able to go to the temple for worship. Asked whether Christians and Mussalmans were permitted to use these roads, he replied in the affirmative and said that they were superior to the unapproachables in as much as, he said, they, the unapproachables, were so born as a fit punishment for their misdeeds in the past incarnation and that the taint was indelible during their present incarnation. The spokesman who expressed these views is I am told a learned

man. I have no doubt that he believes what he says. Whilst, therefore, I hold his view to be totally mistaken and contrary to Hinduism and humanity, I can find it in me to treat him as a friend worthy of regard and affection. That is my meaning of toleration. I do not look forward to a time when we shall all hold one and the same view but I do look forward to a time when we shall love one another in spite of the sharpest differences of opinion.

And so I made the following proposal to the friends:

(I) They should produce Shankara's authority in support of their contention and I would advise the withdrawal of Satyagraha from Vaikam should the learned Shastris, whom I may consider regard it as authentic and clearly bearing the construction sought to be put upon it by the orthodox party. It could not blind me for all places for the simple reason that even if Shankaracharya had

the view in his time, I would not be bound by what appeared to me to be contrary to religion and humanity.

(2) The whole matter could be referred to arbitration consisting of a learned man to be nominated by them, another to be nominated by me on behalf of the Satyagrahis and the Dewan of Travancore to be the umpire.

(3). A referendum to be taken of all the adult male and female caste Hindus of Vaikam alone or of the whole of Travancore or selected areas according as they preferred. The Government should be invited to participate in the organisation of the referendum. The third proposal was put first by me as it was contended by the orthodox party that the caste Hindus were against the reform. But when I took them at their word and said that I would gladly agree to a referendum, the spokesmen veered round and said that in a matter of religious conviction a man could not be bound by

the verdict of a majority. I appreciated the force of the suggestion and made the other two proposals. I may say in passing that I proposed a referendum because the present Satyagraha is based upon the supposition that Savarna public opinion is in favour of reform.

None of the proposals was, however, accepted by the gentlemen and I am sorry to say that we parted company without coming to any understanding. I then waited upon Her Highness and she granted me a patient and courteous hearing. She was anxious for the opening of the road at Vaikam and appreciated the proposals made by me.

I waited also upon His Holiness Shr Narayan Swami Guru. He entirely approved of the Satyagraha movement and said that violence would never succeed and that non-violence was the only method. The next day I waited upon the Dewan Bahadur. He too said he was entirely on the side of reform. His only

difficulty was that as an administrator he could not legislate unless there was strong and clearly expressed public opinion. I suggested that he should insist upon the opponents of reform accepting one of my proposals. They could not entrench themselves behind an ancient custom if it was, as this was, contrary to humanity and public morals.

Here the matter rests for the time being. The Satyagrahis hold the result in the hollow of their hands. They must continue without fatigue, without despair, without anger, or irritation and with forbearance towards the opponents and the Government. By their dignified bearing and patient suffering they will break down the iron wall of prejudice and they will stimulate and draw public opinion towards them and will force the hands of the Government if the orthodox itself does not yield to their gentle treatment.

10th September, 1925

## A DAY WITH AHMEDABAD MILLHANDS

An item of considerable interest in the strenuous programme which was in store for Gandhiji even during his brief stay at Ahmedabad, was the meeting with children of the Ahmedabad millhands studying in schools organised and controlled by the Ahmedabad Labour Union, and with the millhands themselves. Gandhiji congratulated the organisers for the efficient management and suggested to them to pay particular attention to the cultivation of habits of cleanliness among boys. The thing that specially struck him was the number of untouchable boys in the schools and the systematic way in which spinning was organised. The successful experiment of introducing wheelless spinning in the school drew the following remarks from Gandhiji: 'I now see that the attempt to introduce spinning wheels in school was not well conceived. For the spinning wheel has none of the advantages of the *Takli*, I am convinced that the *Takli* has potency enough to bring about an effective boycott of foreign cloth, if all the spinning wheels in the country happened to be destroyed. The spinning wheel is essentially fitted for the cottage, the *Takli* requiring no extra room, no string, no oiling, specially fitted for the schoolroom.' It was a pleasure to see the boys playing away with their *Taklis*, a



drawing strong even thread, listening all the while to Gandhiji who was addressing the meeting. As a result of a couple of months's experiment over three hundred boys know Takli-spinning and the infection seems to be spreading fast among the rest of the boys.

Having spoken to the school-teachers and addressed a remark or two to the mill owners, he talked to the boys. Gandhiji and the boys both had a merry time of it. 'So you see boys, that you must keep your teeth absolutely clean, and your nails regularly clipped. To the Mussalman boys amongst you I must tell a story. The Somali Arabs are so particular about the beauty of their teeth that whilst on board they carry a huge tooth stick with which they go on polishing their teeth for hours together, with the result that they are very healthy and have a beautiful physique.' But inward cleanliness was as important as outward and when Gandhiji asked a boy what the former meant, straight came the reply 'purity of heart'. 'But where is the heart?' 'Here' said a boy, placing his hand on his breast. 'And who is the Watchmaker who keeps that watch going night and day?' 'God, of course' exclaimed the boys. Well, then, you must keep the watch in order so that the Watchmaker may not have to be troubled every now and then about its repair. The body and the heart have both to be kept scrupulously clean. And I see that a majority of you are 'untouchables' or *Dheds*. Do you know that you *Dhed* boys are all my adopted sons? And if you want to deserve that honour, you must be even cleaner than other boys.'

In the evening the parents of the children met Gandhiji under the shade of the tree which has, since the successful strike of 1918, become historic. For every yearly meeting they meet under the tree where in 1918 they met for twenty-three long days and listened to Srimati Anasuyabai and Gandhiji. It is of interest to note that Mr. Ambalal Sarabhai and Mr. Gordhanbhai Patel, the former a big Millowner and the latter Secretary of the Millowners' Association also attended the function. The annual report of the Labour Union which was an exhaustive one was not read by the Secretary who in a businesslike manner summarised the salient features thereof. They are of no less interest than the facts and figures about the schools. The Union had during the year under report a membership of 14,000, and an income from subscription of Rs. 25,000. Every department has elected its representatives who met 74 times during the year, and the Union workers held no less than 130 meetings in the mill compounds during the noon recess. The Union attended to 743 complaints during the year--no strike authorized by the Union having taken place--and the Secretary notes with satisfaction that, "officials of the Union met with sympathetic and courteous treatment at the hands of the mill-authorities, who invariably evinced a sincere desire to do the just thing. We are able to say that some of the mills we have not had to visit till today for the purpose of making complaints." The Union has also opened a savings Bank for the benefit of thrifty members, and advanced Rs. 10,668 on cheap loans. It is of interest to note that 50 per cent of these loans were

for meeting the deficit in current expenditure and 41 per cent for repayment of old debts in respect of which an interest of as much as 200 per cent had to be paid. The Union has a well-equipped hospital under a highly qualified doctor, and with special maternity and female wards. It also sold cheap Khaddar worth Rs. 2662 and cheap grain worth Rs. 17,000. There is a special Social Betterment Department which studies the conditions of the labourers. It collected information about 2000 houses, and its investigations promise to go a great way in promoting the general enlightenment of the millhands and their social betterment. The Union has rightly appealed to the millowners for co-operation in this work, as a betterment in the condition of methods means a sure improvement in their efficiency. But it may be noted that the Union does not want to make the millowners' omissions a pretext for doing nothing. 'We understand' says the Report, 'that we have to come to the mills perfectly prepared to commence work right at starting time. We should not leave the workroom more frequently or a minute longer than is necessitated by urgent demands of Nature. We should assure to the Mills flawless work, careful handling of machinery, minimum waste of materials and stores.' This is a resolve which will make the position of the Union especially strong and will entitle it in a special measure to the encouragement and sympathy of millowners. It reflects no little credit on the millhands also that one of the representatives who spoke at the meeting, frankly confessed that the excessive trade depression did not permit them to push forth their

grievances in the matter of pay, and said that they should be satisfied if all the previous awards of the arbitrators were carried out by the mills.

Gandhiji in his speech laid especial stress on the labourers' duty. He knew they had grievances about insufficient water supply, lack of dining sheds, proper cleaning of latrines, beatings and illtreatment by jobbers and numerous breakages of ends in the throstle department and consequent less work and less wages. But he was sure that some of the things depended on themselves on their cultivation of proper self respect. He was glad to note that the Union had redeemed the debts of some of them and substituted cheap loans for loans on exorbitant rates of interest. But it was a sad commentary on their way of life that they should have to borrow so much. Their wages may be insufficient, but he had no doubt that if they were more thrifty, free from drink and other evil habits, they would not have to be indebted. He was very glad that the millhands recognised the difficult situation of the millowners at the present moment. 'I am glad,' he said, 'you recognise this. You cannot ask for more pay when they are going through serious difficulties. A time might come when loyal labourers may have to come forward with an offer to serve without any wages, in order that the mills may not have to be closed down. But I know that you are not prepared today for that. There is not that amount of trust between you and the millowner. You are labouring under numerous injustices, and unless the millowners have won you over by considerate and loving treatment, you are going to do nothing of the kind.'

today. But that is a consummation towards which I want you to work. '

The relations between the Union and the Association are, it is pleasant to note, better than anywhere else in India. It is due of course, to the existence of a well-organised and strong Union. Gandhiji had a frank chat with the Secretary of the Millowners' Association, drew his attention to the millowners' duties, told him how at Jamshedpur the Tatas left nothing to be desired at least in the matter of clean water supply and proper disposal of sewage, and asked him to take a leaf out of their book. The gentleman received the suggestion very kindly, and at the meeting of the schoolboys announced amidst cheers that he would make immediate payment of the arrears of their contribution to the expenses of the school, and would consider all the complaints in the matter of insufficient water supply, breakages of ends etc. that would be sent him....M. D.

---

*17th September, 1925*

## CHARACTER AND VILLAGE ORGANISATION

At a meeting of the College Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association, Calcutta, Gandhiji was called upon to speak, last month, on a subject he had not thought of before. There was evidently some misunderstanding. He was under the impression that he had to speak on 'Village Organisation' whereas he was asked to speak on 'Value and possibility of Personality' a subject which puzzled him a little. But he came to a compromise

and spoke on the subject of the evening incidentally touching on the subject of village organisation too. If personality meant character, as he had no doubt it did, then almost any one could be got to address on the value of character. Bhartrihari, king philosopher and poet rolled in one, thus summed up the power of character. 'What will not Satsang do for a man?'

Character should be lived in one's own life. He would place purity of public life before anything else and say that a nation which disregarded purity of public life was doomed to perdition. Village organisation seemed a simple word but it meant the organisation of the whole of India, in as much as India was predominantly rural. Sir Henry Maine had left a work on Village communities which every one might treasure. He had shown to India and to the world that the village life of India to-day was what it was five thousand years ago, which did not imply that the Indians were barbarous. On the contrary the writer had made it clear that the Indian village life had so much vitality and character that it had persisted all these long years and weathered many a storm. He had described these villages as so many village republics completely self-contained, having all that one may want—schools; arbitration boards, sanitation boards, and a Poor Law indeed, but ample provision for the relief of the poor.

He had also shown the treasures of art that the genius of the Indian villager had produced. The village then learnt from his parents by word of mouth all the wisdom that he should learn. In daily contact with people

he was able to realise the value and possibility of personality. To him the village headman was a personality in himself. He was not the impostor of to-day; he was the servant of the people whom they could go to in times of difficulties, whom every child in the village knew and loved. He was incorruptible. he was a gentleman. But such a one was a rare bird to-day. 'What' asked the speaker, with a sigh, 'has come over this land that all these beautiful things are not to be found anywhere, that instead of those self-contained villages of a few hundred years ago we find villages dependent for their very necessities of life on Lancashire or Japan?' The whole village life was broken. People were dying by millions of malaria, hookworm and other diseases all brought about by insanitation, deep poverty, sloth and idleness. What created this disruption and brought about this downfall? One might search the records of the East India Company and see for himself how ruthlessly the village system was broken up by means mainly foul. Men who had served the East India company had left imperishable records of how injustice, bribery and corruption reigned supreme in those days, and how relentlessly the handicrafts of India were ruined. A famine or a flood left the villagers absolutely destitute. But why should a village flooded be absolutely stranded and compelled to live on charity? The speaker had known the effects of flood in South Africa. There no relief was necessary. They had not to be fed by the State. They had cottage occupations. They worked. They had savings to fall back upon. Here there was no occupation save agriculture, no work and no

savings, unemployment for four months and even six months in the year in the villages of Bengal. That was the problem before village organisers and in the solution of that problem, the speaker said, the power of personality could be made to be felt. 'I say' said the speaker, summing up 'go with your character' to the villages and express it through some loving act of service or kindness. It will be instinctively understood and responded to. Let any young man who has a character to save venture out to the villages and he will get a response. But he will have to be patient and truthful. There is no character where there is no patience and truth and gentleness and humility. He will not go out as a patron saint of the villages, he will have to go in humility with a broom stick in his hand. There is a Trinity of Evil in sanitation poverty and idleness that you will have to be faced with and you will fight them with broom-sticks, quinine and casto oil, and if you will believe me, with the spinning wheel. But all these will not help you without character. You must come down from your high pedestals, stoop to conquer take the risk of catching malaria yourself. This work will give you all the satisfaction that your soul can desire. It will enrich the villagers' life and your life.' - M.D.

-----  
10th December, 1925

### A TYPICAL SCHOOL

I had occasion the other day to visit a nation school in our neighbourhood. It used to be regarded a good school in the heyday of Non-co-operation, and ev



today is a bad school, only because the number of students is dwindling and the people of the village call it so. And they call it bad because they do not want it, and they do not want it because they have had no matriculates or graduates these four years!

But it was a pure pleasure to meet the boys who showed that at least one benefit they had from having studied in a national school viz. that they could think for themselves, and act independently. We had a talk about bad habits and that of smoking was picked out as the worst. I asked such as were given to the habit to raise their hands. There was a slight hesitation and then hands began to be raised in quick succession, until the smokers outnumbered the nonsmokers and laughed heartily at the discovery. The next question was about giving it up, for they all knew it was a bad habit. Nearly half the boys raised their hands. I questioned and cross-questioned them and was satisfied that they wanted to get rid of their habit. One of the boys said, 'it is not difficult, sir, to give up the habit. I have not smoked for months now. But I smoked only this morning!' I next began to tackle the conservatives. Of course, they were at a loss to say why they could not think of giving up the habit, and looked puzzled. But one of them stood up ultimately and bravely said: 'How am I to take the vow when I know that I will break it tomorrow? The wish is there but not the will.' I asked him if he felt any particular pleasure in smoking, which he would have to sacrifice if he gave up the habit. 'No pleasure, sir. One likes to smoke in company. It is difficult to resist a *bidat*

{country cigarette) when offered,' he said. 'But supposing you avoid such company for the time being?' There was no answer for some time. But after a while he stood up and said, 'I will not take the vow. I shall make the best attempt. But I might fail once in a way.' I was touched by the boys' frankness.

The talk next turned to another topic—a live topic in the village—about the existence of the school itself. The elders have made it the burning topic of the day and the boys also must be discussing it. A very large majority declared themselves in favour of the school, those against were so because of the parents. We then began discussing the essentials of a national school. Freedom from Government aid or interference was of course the first, another was spinning and Khaddar. But there were some who had no Khaddar on. I separated those who had objections to wearing Khaddar from those who had none, but did not from lack of will. The division of course could not be mutually exclusive. But I took up the objectors. Some objected on the score of coarseness and some of dearness. But there was one who did not seem to mince matters. 'It may not be dear and ultimately cheap as you explain. But you must argue it out with my parents and not with me. I may be willing, and am willing, but my parents are not.' I offered them the *takli* and possibility of making their own clothing out of the yarn done on the *takli*. There were some who were frankly no game for the enterprise. It sounded like a fairy tale to them. But a considerable minority asked me to initiate them in

the art of the *tukli* and to send them some from Sabarmati.

But the third and great essential had not yet been discussed. 'Are you sure' I asked, 'you would be pure enough to enter the portals of a national school only if the Khaddar and the non-co-operation conditions were satisfied? Is there no more purificatory condition wanting?' One of the boys stood up and said: 'We should be prepared to sit along with the untouchables here.' Almost simultaneously another friend stood up in protest: 'How can we, how can we? Only the other day when I went to the untouchables' quarter they killed before my very eyes a young kid!' 'Do you allow cats to enter your houses and even your kitchens?' I asked. 'We do' he replied and smiled to show that he saw the implications of my question. But another stood up and took up the cudgels on his friend's behalf: 'But the cat kills birds and mice because we give them no food to eat. The untouchables get food to eat, and yet kill goats and eat meat'. 'Are you sure,' I asked, 'you give the untouchables enough food to eat?' 'Yes' he replied unabashed, 'we do; they work in our fields and they earn a living and are quite well-to-do.' He was evidently a landlord's son and grudged the poor untouchable labourer his hard-earned bread. 'Let us assume that the untouchable affords to abjure meat and yet does not do so. Are there other people in the community who can afford to do so, and yet eat meat?' 'There are, there are,' replied a number of them in chorus. And then in the end stood up one, speaking as though to sum up the debate: 'To tell

you the truth, sir, it is not that we do not at all touch these people. We touch them when we want, we go to their homes and coax and cajole them, when labour is scarce, and many of us do not hesitate to touch them. We are simply shirking the issue.'

When I saw the parents I told them what a pleasure it had been to me to meet their children, and how the school and the atmosphere had inculcated in them a spirit of independent thinking. 'But the result?' they impatiently asked. They had short memories, they seemed to have forgotten how and why they started the national school and wanted results from it which it could not give. 'We started the school because the boys wanted it' one of them said, 'and we want to close it down, as they don't want it today.' Now that was a pure fib. How I hope the boys will stand up against the leading lights of the village, if at all the time comes, and refuse to go to an aided school. --M.D.

-----  
24th March, 1927

### FACE TO FACE WITH THE PAUPER

[The following is a free translation made by Mahade Desai of an accurate account vividly told in the pages of *Navajivan* by a Khadi worker of pauperism in parts of Bardoli taluka which is supposed to be one of the most fertile places of Gujarat. The account is written in the form of a story. The writer bids fair to become the people's poet of a very high order. Its artistic beauty adds to its intrinsic worth. I commend it specially to the attention of the skeptic.—M.K.G.]

We were out to see God in the shape of the poor —*Daridra Narayana*—face to face. So we went to Vedchhi Ashram, where Sjt. Chunilal Mehta and his good wife are toiling away in the service of the 'black' aborigines of the Surat district. Mrs. Chunilal gave us a hearty welcome and said: 'Yes, we are here as worshippers of that God and we can secure you His *darshan*.' Sjt. Chunilal drew out his spinners' register and read out to us: '271¼ lbs. of yarn spun at Vedchhi; 242¾ lbs. at Mavaria; 213 lbs. at Beda; 103¼ at Repwada.' He read the names of 53 villages, showed that 2,736 lbs. of yarn was spun in 320 huts, and said that there could not be a better proof of the existence of the God *Daridra Narayana* in those parts than the fact that people had adhered to the spinning wheel with tenacity. But we wanted to see God face to face, were not content to deduce His existence from figures. The Brahmana may sing to us his Gayatri (praise to the Sun), we pine none the less for a *darshan* of *Surya Narayana*.

So Chunibhai accompanied us on our adventure. Our footpath lay through fields shining with the golden yellow of cotton flowers, and through Jowari stalks bending with heavy ears of green corn, and some-where the path was kissed by the branches of mango trees laden with bunches of fresh blossom. Little peasant boys were sitting on their field nests, scaring away the birds with their lusty cries and pebbles hurled from their slings. In some fields the farmer was making a breakfast from the grain of roasted ears of green corn. 'How can there be *Daridra Narayana* in these places smiling with plenty?' we said to ourselves.

Just at the moment a cart went past us along a village rut. The occupant appeared to be like a *seph* heavy and well-fed. He confirmed our doubts. Then went past us a youth on horseback, his face lacking all signs of culture, but full of the pride of wealth. His gorgeous dress of foreign tinsel made him out to be a son of some village landlord. He strengthened our doubts still more. Surely these could not be the haunts of *Daridra Narayana*.

But in a moment another cart went by, followed by another and yet another, in all seven or eight with loads of pieces of *babul*. The eyes of the bullocks panting with fatigue were sticking out of their sockets and yet the *Chaudra* angry with fatigue was urging with his prod the poor beasts to go on. The bones were sticking out of his skin too. The carts were all as rickety as the poor beasts that drew them and their wretched driver. The spokes were all loose with bits of stone wedged in the hub to keep them in position!

Not one of the faces was lighted up with a ray of hope. We thought of the hard toil they must have gone through in felling the trees and hewing those pieces of wood, and piling them in the carts. Even the usual hope of selling these pieces in the market and having shining pieces of silver and purchasing corn therewith for the family and the animals and little things for the children was absent here. It would have sufficed to light up their eyes. But theirs were dark and vacant sockets. For they were carrying their loads to some *Sowcar* or some oppressive hireling of Government. They did not expect to get any shining bits of silver to purchase their noon meal

with. Hard bread of corn and grass for their bullocks they had taken from home. There was no room for hope in them, there was instead the spectre of fear ever haunting them. 'What if the load is rejected as insufficient?' one of them was fearing. Another was probably nourishing a cunning desire quickly to unload his cart and drive back home, lest he should be asked to stay to make up the pieces into a pile or lest his bullocks be impressed for further labour.

Well, well, there is a still darker shade in the picture. Some of the cartmen were stinking with liquor or *toddy*, one of them was lying face downwards dead drunk, and one raving with intoxication. As though the despair was not enough to choke them, the fumes of drink had been called in aid to complete the work!

So the carts went past us, Chunibhai leading us without saying a word. At long last the knowledge dawned on us that these were not the carts of hewers of wood, but the chariots of *Daridra Narayana*. The story is told of Tulsidas having allowed Rama and Lakshmana to pass by unrecognised and then having repented of his neglect. If we may compare small things with great, we were also in some such plight as Tulsidas.

But there were yet more images of *Daridra Narayana* to see. We reached a rivulet called Jhankhari. There was a little hut on the bank, a crowd of men sitting in the courtyard—an old man and an old woman, a few youngsters and little children of both sexes.

They were all unclean and dirty, their yard no less so. The door of the cottage was broken, and the children had

made holes into the walls by pulling out the wicker work. The children were all naked, women and bigger girls had made just an attempt to hide their shame, and the men had loincloths and pieces of rags wrapped round their heads. That constituted their dress. 'How could such a crowd of people live in such a tiny hut? What could they be eating?' we wondered. Chunibhai said, 'They make baskets of bamboochips and sell them.'

'What can they be getting out of that work? They are all sitting without work! What can be their wages? one of us asked: 'why are they all so dirty living as they do close to the river?'

Chunibhai said: 'That's their poverty.' Pandyaji said: 'They must be staying here for the convenience of wetting their bamboos.'

Chunibhai---'And they are the untouchables among the submerged 'black' classes! So they have had to stay far away from the village proper.'

One of us had already discovered that this was the best chance of seeing *Daridra Narayana* at close quarters. He was longing to get into the hut, when the knowledge, that they were untouchables whetted his desire. 'Let us go in and have a talk with them,' he said.

The children all ran into the hut pellmell. The old man for a moment eyed us with distrust. We all greeted them with 'Ram Ram' and reassured them somewhat. Pandyaji stretched out his hands, after the fashion of the people, to embrace them. The old man was dumbfounded, unable to believe his eyes. In a moment his eyes met Pandyaji's and read the affection in them, and at last he held out his



hands with palms rough from splitting bamboos. For the first time in his life, his hand touched the hands of a Brahmana. He felt its purifying touch, the Brahmana himself feeling purified in turn.

And we began to talk. They used to get enough to keep their body and soul together in the days gone by when they were at liberty to cut the bamboo free of cost. Now they have to pay for it, and that takes away part of their scanty earnings. They go out with their wares to the villages, sometimes sell them off for a song for want of demand and have often enough to return home with the things unsold.

The hut walls are dilapidated. They have no fields to get dry osiers to make their walls with, and in these days of high prices no one would give them gratis osiers and wicker and grass. Then we turned to the question of clothes. We described to them how they could have clothes at little cost.

Chunibhai said: 'We will give you spinning wheels and slivers gratis, as you are too poor to pay for them.'

The next day the old man with his three young sons went to the Vedchhi Ashram, and four wheels of plenty went that day, borne on the shoulders of the four, to dispel despair from that cottage.

Mrs. Chunilal and her daughters rushed out of their kitchen and cheered the old man with hearty promises of help. 'Don't you worry. My daughters and I will go to your hut tomorrow to teach you spinning, you can learn it in a moment, but we shall continue to come until you

have all learnt it. Please therefore look out for us tomorrow afternoon.'

'Not tomorrow, sister, we have to go to the market tomorrow to sell our baskets. Come day after tomorrow.'

'All right, day after tomorrow.'

Jivan Kaka an old man who has known the happiness of possessing a wheel, and stays on the opposite bank said: 'I also will come of an afternoon. Good bye, good luck is already with you.'

## II

Then we went into another direction.

Twenty miles from Vedchhi is Bartad, also a Raniparaj village. There are some houses with tiled roofs --a sign of comparative prosperity and the rest have thatched ones.

People like us visiting the village with the message of the Charkha and the like would go straight to those houses with tiled roofs, for there is the likelihood of a welcome there, and of some sort of a response too.

But one of our friends with his irrepressible curiosity asked every one he met the same old question: 'Who is the poorest man here?'

So Ranchhod Dhulia took us for the *darshan* of the poorest pauper. The evening twilight was slowly disappearing and darkness was coming on. Some of us had no shoes on and the thorns in the way scared them away.

At last we came to a cottage. Dark inside.

'Any one in?'

Some light could now be seen inside. An ailing man

was lying bare-bodied and huddled up on a tattered mat. In the eathern stove near him fire was blazing, as it was in the man's body too. By his side was seated his wife Gomati. Their two children were nestling near the stove.

We went and examined the patient, and offered advice: 'Pray don't give him anything to eat to-night. Fasting will do him good and get rid of the heaviness in the stomach and fever.' Little did we know that the poor woman could not have given anything to eat even if she had wished.

Gomati kept the fire burning, and the hut lighted, by feeding it with rotten rushes and reeds from time to time, and her face too was lit up with a smile that seemed to fill her unhappy hut.

'Have you no lamp?'

'Where am I to get the oil from?'

'Did you go out to work today?'

'There was no work waiting for me.'

'What did you have for your breakfast today?'

'Fed somehow. I picked a few ears from the enclosure opposite and brewed some gruel.'

'What will you eat tomorrow?'

'Just as we did today. There are some stalks in the field still standing to help us scratch along for a few days.'

The enclosure was no field regularly tilled. A few grains of corn had been scattered there before the rains and so there were some stalks of *jowari* to keep the house going. We were listening to her but she had not yet

succeeded in reaching our hearts. Her smile hid all grief from us. So we pursued our callous enquiry.

‘What did you have for your dinner?’

‘Whatever we could have.’

She did not want to tell her tale of woe to any but God. But we were too dense to see her self-respect. We asked again: ‘Yes, but let us know what exactly had.’

‘What could we have for dinner? There was so much gruel left over in the morning with which we fed children.’

‘So you have no food-stuffs in the house?’

Her self-respect could stand no more strain and so how we had inspired some confidence in her as Gand men. So she no longer minced matters.

‘Come and see the whole hut for yourself, she said with the torch of a burning reed in her hand and asked to follow her.

Our footsteps disturbed a cock inside who hopped away into a corner.

One of us asked: ‘You must be selling eggs for course?’

With an uncanny presence of mind she replied: ‘I think the cock lays eggs?’ And then as though to get off the coarseness of that retort she delicately added:

‘People keep parrots in their houses. We keep a cock. It gives the children some play and lends a charm to the house.’

We ransacked the whole hut in vain. We now gave up and said: ‘It’s only you who can bear your ci-

God is your saviour, and the spinning wheel too, if you will,'

So we saw the Pauper face to face and returned home. We passed a Dubla's hut on our way. The wife was sitting in the courtyard with her crowd of children sitting round a fire. The little ones ran away into the hut. The woman got up to greet us.

'What had you for breakfast?' we asked.

In a voice expressive of great delight she said: 'Rice and dal.' She was certainly much happier than Gomati, we thought, and proceeded further. But our curious friend stopped us. For he had carried on the conversation.

'What did you have for breakfast?'

'Rice and dal, of course.'

'And the same for dinner?'

'Yes, something was left over this morning.'

'How much did you cook this morning.'

'Two pounds.'

So with two pounds she had fed herself, her seven children, saved something for the evening and had their dinner out of it!

'Where is your man? Gone out?'

'The master has summoned him and he has gone here.' The master happened to be known to one of us. The family were servants (or slaves?) of this master who had ill-treated them and the poor man had fled from his clutches. But the master had traced him out and one might well imagine what must have happened to the wretch.

As though this was not enough, we asked one more

question before we left her in peace. Did you go to work today?’

‘How could I go? Who would take care of the children?’

We were silenced, but in a moment we mustered courage to say to her: If you have a wheel, the children can playfully spin on it, and you can earn a few copper

### III

We were returning home after a four days’ sojourn in the Raniparaj area, when we came to a village to which one of our pupils belonged. He insisted on our making a halt at his place. He is one of the best of our boys, surpassing the rest in his power of understanding difficult things. None of us knew the state of things at his home. It is only when we stopped at this village that we learned that his father was given to drink and was in a miserable condition.

So we went to his house. We found his old father and mother living separately from him and his brother, as the sons disapproved of the old man’s vicious habit.

Our young friend had made a hut of his own. The artistic beauty it would put a royal palace to shame. He had made it all out of date-palm branches woven with the skill that he could lavish on it. But no sooner was the hut ready than he heard of the weaving school in Bardoli Ashram and left home to join it. One of us, who was the teacher of this young friend, asked the old man

‘How do you like the idea of your boy having come to our school?’

‘ Well, one has to like what one gets. What does he care for us ?’

‘ Why, did he not work for you ?’

‘ How does his work help us ? We have a heavy load of debt, how long am I to carry it alone ?’

‘ You have debts ?’

Is it any wonder ?’

Then he told us how he had gradually lost 16 *bighas* of land his father had left him, and had incurred a debt of four to five hundred rupees in the bargain. The old man was exclusively responsible for all this debt. I shall not dilate here as to how one gets into the dark dungeon of debt, for very little or even no fault of his own.

‘ But’, our friend argued, ‘ what at the most is the help that the boy can give you today ? Let him learn some profession and then he will be able to relieve you of your debt quicker. ’

But we had not understood the old man’s point. So far as the debt was concerned, he was clearing it bit by bit. But he was not equal to the constant dunning of the creditors who insulted him and swore at him. He wanted the boy to receive the blows for him.

There was no way in which we could comfort the old man. The boy was adamant, and would not return home. Even if he did, what could he do to help his father ?

Our inability to find a way out for him made us hesitate to touch him at the sore spot. But we did ask him and tried to reason with him. He was all the while answering in affirmative monosyllables. So we were led up

to ask him, 'Well, then, you will give up drink, won't you?'

The old man paused for a moment. We repeated our question. At last he mustered courage to say: 'Impossible.'

'Why? Impossible--is that what you say?'

'Yes, it is impossible.'

'Surely, you should have some regard for your son's feelings.'

'The boy should have some regard for mine and turn home to share my burden. Then I give it up.'

The boy had been bearing the brunt of the burden of late, and yet the old man had stuck to his habit. Where then was the certainty of his giving it up now? The boy was not prepared to trust the old man.

Later on we came to know the reasons for the old man's reluctance. About him and around him lived liquor and toddy-sellers whose wrath he was sure to incur if he turned teetotaller and became a *bhagat* (man of God), an epithet contemptuously applied to abstainers by the others. And a teetotaller *bhagat* was sure to find it difficult to get work. Often he would have to put up with abuse as did his boy who had given up drink. Whereas if he continued to belong to the band of tipplers he would have no hitch in earning his bread.

But now the boy reasoned with his father. 'The toddy-sellers tempt us to drink, but they don't drink, they?'

'They do not, no doubt, but it is no joke to incur their wrath.'



The old man trotted out another plea : ' It does not cost us to drink. We work for them and get a drink in the bargain.'

We wondered at the endurance and patience of the boy who, though he was burning with the agony I have described, had become our best boy absorbed in his studies.

We knew the old man was like a shipwrecked man on a stormy sea. It was no use offering him a little canoe in the shape of our spinning wheel. But we offered it nevertheless for what it was worth, and proceeded on our way.

We wondered if we could not have a usuary bill and a prohibition law for these people. That would relieve them of their debt. But Government have devised make-shifts in the shape of Co-operative Credit Societies. They may at best offer them money at moderate interest and tempt them to run into more debt. They cannot *give* them any relief. If it can at all be given, it can be given by the Charkha and by taking away the temptation of Drink.

We had seen God as the Pauper face to face, but we were far from satisfied. For *Daridra Narayana* manifests himself in multitudinous forms and we had seen but two or three. But the conviction was strengthened in us that the best way to worship *Daridra Narayan* is by offering Him the spinning wheel. One of us said : ' Gandhiji must have discovered the spinning wheel from experiences like these.'

Another said : ' Quite true, only his experience was not enough for us, we wanted to go through the same before our hearts could accept his solution.

PRINTED BY S. GANESAN,  
AT THE CURRENT THOUGHT PRESS, TRIPUNICAVEL, MADRAS

